

TESTIMONY OF
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BEFORE THE
Illinois Senate Redistricting Committee
Chicago, Illinois
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Good afternoon. My name is Kathy Nesburg. I am the chair of the Redistricting Committee of the League of Women Voters of Illinois (LWVIL). Thank you for this opportunity to come before you today to discuss the Illinois Fair Map Citizens' Initiative.

The LWVIL along with other reform groups and individuals unveiled this citizens' initiative last week. Our goal is to amend the Illinois Constitution to change the manner in which the districts of the Illinois General Assembly are drawn after each decennial Census. Our intent is to allow Illinois voters to choose their legislators from fairly drawn districts and to end a system designed to let the elected officials choose the citizens they will represent.

We believe that the process which led to the final proposed amendment was a thorough and thoughtful one. Participants included a broad cross section of those interested in redistricting reform, including the Better Government Association, the Illinois Campaign for Political Reform, the Citizens Advocacy Center and members of the Illinois Reform Commission. We began with the recommendation of the bipartisan Illinois Reform Commission, led by Patrick Collins. Their proposed amendment incorporated ideas in other, earlier proposals. Many contributors submitted their ideas, concepts, wordings, thoughts and recommendations. Drafts were critiqued and reworked. Lawyers, civil rights experts and other redistricting experts were consulted and gave their recommendations.

We focused on drafting a proposal that meets the requirements of Article XIV, Section 3 of the Illinois Constitution, which requires that "Amendments shall be limited to structural and procedural subjects contained in Article IV." This was done by separating the redistricting process and the maps for the House and Senate. And we focused on making the redistricting process open, fair and transparent.

The proposed amendment assigns the work of redistricting to a nine member commission of whom eight members are chosen by the legislative leaders. None of the members can be a lobbyist, political official, state employee or contractor. Contrast this with Article IV, Section 3 (b) of the Illinois Constitution which gives the General Assembly first crack at drawing the maps. The commission will share the Census data with the public and make the redistricting software available to the public. Criteria for the redistricting plans are defined and rank ordered. A timeline is set out which allows for public participation and comment before the voting begins. The maps must receive an

affirmative vote of at least two thirds of the members elected to each house. If a map fails to receive an affirmative vote, a second map will be sent. If that map is not approved, the commission shall approve one of the two plans by a majority vote. If any of the deadlines are missed, two justices of the Illinois Supreme Court, the Chief Justice and a justice from the other political party, will choose a Special Master who meets all of the criteria required of the members of the commission. The Special Master will draw the maps, hold public hearings on the maps, finalize the maps and file the redistricting plans with the Secretary of State not later than September 30. Contrast this with the current back-up system of appointing a commission of eight and choosing a tie-breaker out of a hat when the commission fails to reach an agreement.

The General Assembly will still have a part in the process, since its leaders will choose the members of the commission. The two chambers will have two chances to vote on the maps submitted to them. But, they will not draw the final maps. Protecting incumbents will not be the first consideration of the map drawers.

The LWVIL has for many years promoted important redistricting principles which we believe are reflected in the proposed amendment which contains specific criteria, is timely and transparent, and supports communities of interest.

The League fundamentally believes that the voters should choose their representatives, not the other way around as is the case in the current process which is really nothing more than an incumbent protection plan. According to data obtained at the State Board of Elections, since the current legislative map was drawn by legislators in 2001, incumbents have won their elections at a staggering 98 percent success rate. The League believes that citizen participation is necessary to maintain and strengthen democracy and that a fair and open redistricting process will encourage citizen participation.

We believe that Illinois is weary of politics as usual and that the status quo of redistricting must be reformed. The LWVIL contends that a citizens' initiative will gain momentum; since the project was launched, we have heard from many interested in working with us in gathering signatures.

Let me introduce my colleague, Valerie Krejcie, who will explain a bit more about why the criteria contained in the amendment is critical to understanding the substance of the amendment.