Testimony on Redistricting
By
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On behalf the Michigan Redistricting Collaborative, thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding the need for a transparent and open redistricting process.

My name is Sue Smith and I am the President-Elect of the League of Women Voters of Michigan and a member of the Michigan Redistricting Collaborative.

As you may already know, the Michigan Redistricting Collaborative is a coalition of nonprofits from all segments of the community, including business, labor and public interest, that believe redistricting must be more transparent and open, with more involvement from the public.

More than 35 organizations are members of the Collaborative, working together because we all believe that voters should choose their elected officials, not the other way around.

Unfortunately, Michigan, unlike other states, does not have a history of providing opportunities for public input on redistricting plans.

Iowa, for example, has finished its congressional and legislative redistricting exercise, following public meetings and input – and the plan adopted had widespread support from Republicans and Democrats.

In Illinois, the state Senate is holding two public hearings after maps are drawn, and before they are approved – different than the usual process where the public is an afterthought.

Here in Michigan, however, we haven't seen any maps. Our concern is that this redistricting process will be similar to the one in 2001 when redistricting legislation was adopted by a legislative conference committee, with no members of the public being afforded a chance to even look at the maps, let alone offer any significant input, and then approved on straight party line votes and sent to Gov. John Engler for prompt signature. The secretive actions only added to public skepticism about the political process – and rightly so.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak today, I'd now like to ask Christina Kuo with Common Cause to speak regarding the Collaborative's specific recommendations.

Good Morning. I'm Christina Kuo, Executive Director of Common Cause Michigan and member of the Michigan Redistricting Collaborative.

The Redistricting Collaborative is recommending the Legislature take the following small steps to ensure a transparent and open redistricting process:

- Require redistricting plans to be available on the Legislature's website for 30 days before passage.
- Mandate each chamber to hold at least two committee meetings to receive testimony about the plan.
- Hold four public hearings around the state to allow direct comment by the public.
- Provide a statement for each district explaining how the boundaries were drawn and how the district has been changed.

These simple steps would allow for redistricting plans to be more transparent, open and accountable to the public. It would also decrease the level of public scrutiny that is likely to occur if the process is a closed one.

In addition to the states mentioned earlier, counties in Michigan are also taking action to ensure public input.

The counties have just as much statutory and legal guidance as the legislature in regard to redistricting, however, a number of counties (including Ingham, Kalamazoo, and Oakland counties) have gone above what is required of them and embraced our core principles of transparency and citizen participation. Oakland County, especially, is at the forefront of this. Their redistricting commission added a page to the county clerk's website to house all minutes, actions, maps, analyses, and data relating to redistricting in that county. They have adopted procedures that open up the process to citizen input and scrutiny: the maps must be publicly posted on the website for a minimum of 72 hours before the commissioners can deliberate on them. They have held two night meetings, one solely devoted to public feedback on proposed plans by members of the county redistricting commission.

Oakland County shows how simple it is to have a transparent process that provides ample opportunities for citizens to participate and provide feedback on maps, when those charged with redistricting truly want an open and transparent redistricting process.
On behalf of the Michigan Redistricting Collaborative, I urge you to provide opportunity for input on proposed redistricting maps. Transparency is a buzzword often heard in Lansing these days. Here is a chance to have it put into action.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today.