



March 6, 2011

To All Members

Erie County Citizens Advisory Commission (CAC) on Redistricting:

The League of Women Voters of Buffalo Niagara applauds every member for volunteering time and energy to serve on this commission to redraw the Erie County legislative district maps for the next decade. You have a formidable challenge, not only redrawing the district boundaries to reflect population change from the 2010 Census, but creating eleven new districts from the present fifteen.

We recognize that the redistricting process is a very complex one that involves balancing efforts to keep communities together, efforts to ensure minority voting rights and representation, and compliance with the federal "one person one vote" mandate. Independent, fair and thoughtful decision making is the key to a successful outcome..

The League of Women Voters has long been involved with the redistricting and reapportionment process. Most recently in 2009, the National League, together with many other good government groups, endorsed the following four essential principles for redistricting:

1. An accurate and complete count in Census 2010 is an essential building block for all redistricting efforts.
2. The process used for redistricting must be transparent to the public.
3. The redistricting process, at all levels of government, must provide data, tools and opportunities for the public to have direct input into the specific plans under consideration by the redistricting body.
4. In order to achieve representative democracy, redistricting plans must be drawn in a manner that allows elected bodies to reflect the diversity of the populace, especially racial and ethnic diversity.

At the state level the League of Women Voters supports redistricting guidelines contained in Assembly Bill 3432 and Senate Bill 2543. We strongly recommend that the Erie County CAC follows these proposed guidelines as well. (The attached LWV statement of support highlights these guidelines.)

In addition we urge the CAC to adopt the following recommendations to ensure a transparent and open redistricting process:

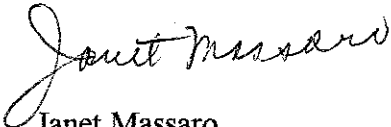
- Conduct CAC meetings and public hearings in diverse geographical locations in the county.
- Conduct public hearings both before and after maps are drawn to solicit public

- comment. (We note that Niagara County has already conducted two public hearings.)
- Provide prominent and adequate notice of times and locations of all meetings and hearings in the news media and on a public Internet site established by the CAC for this purpose.
 - The CAC Web site must be updated continually and include:
 - All necessary demographic and political data used in mapmaking
 - Detailed maps reflecting new demographic and political data
 - Information on software being used by CAC and software the public can use to submit their own maps and make comments
 - Summary reports of all CAC meetings and hearings
 - State the criteria that the CAC will follow in mapmaking and in which order.
 - Prior to adoption of a final plan, a detailed version of the plan, its reasoning for how and why the lines were drawn, as well as any dissenting statements, shall be made available to the public with adequate time for review and comment.

We are all aware that the results of the redistricting undertaking will affect the representation of county citizens for the next decade. The LWV urges you to ensure an equitable, transparent and open process of redistricting, free from partisan influences and gerrymandering, one that will lead to a legislature responsive and accountable to all Erie County residents.

We invite you to attend and participate in a community informational meeting on redistricting on Sunday, April 3, 2011 beginning at 1pm at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Buffalo, corner of Elmwood and Ferry in Buffalo. We will keep you informed of other events as we engage the public in this very important process.

Sincerely,



Janet Massaro,
LWVBN Redistricting Committee

The LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS asks your support for REDISTRICTING REFORM

NYS Senate bill S.2543 and NYS Assembly bill A.3432 will dramatically improve the way New York draws district lines for elections to the State Legislature and to the New York's House of Representatives delegation. It promotes fairness and openness in redistricting and can result in a State Legislature that is more responsive to and accountable to New York State voters.

The proposed legislation

- **creates an Independent Redistricting Commission to draw state legislative and congressional district boundaries for the 2012 elections and beyond.** An independent redistricting commission removes the inherent conflict of interest from the incumbent legislators. Free from political pressure, an independent commission can assume responsibility for drawing lines in a fair, impartial and sensible manner.
- **Requires that Redistricting Commissioners be appointed from a pool of qualified candidates reflective of the state's voters.** Commissioners should represent both genders and reflect the state's full racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity. They should not hold, or should have not held, an elective office, party position or employment, or other positions that would confer partisan influence, within the previous two years.
- **sets clear redistricting standards consistent with state constitutional priorities and federal requirements of the Voting Rights Act.** The Commissioners will prepare legislative district maps that:
 - ensure fair and effective representation of racial and language minority groups
 - incorporate the "one person, one vote" principle, so that no state legislative district shall exceed by one percent of the average population of all Senate and Assembly districts
 - keep districts compact and contiguous to the greatest extent possible
 - keep communities of interest together and respect municipal boundaries
 - are drawn so as not to favor or disfavor any candidate or political party
- **It requires ample public hearings and opportunities for public comment,** including full access to data, maps, criteria, software used, and proposed plans.

The legislation ensures that the legislature has the opportunity to provide feedback to the plans submitted by the Commission consistent with the Legislature's authority under the State Constitution to ultimately approve a redistricting plan.

If reform is to happen we need you to spread the word. Here is what you can do:

- Attend public meetings and hearings
- Contact your legislators and let them know that you support real redistricting reform
- Tell your friends and other organizations about our efforts
- **Visit our web site for information about hearing schedules, League meetings on redistricting, and to view LWV Power Point on Redistricting.**

Information prepared by LWV of Buffalo/Niagara
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