



The League of Women Voters of Virginia

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Statement of Molly McClenon, League of Women Voters of Virginia, to the Virginia Independent Bipartisan Advisory Commission on Redistricting Virginia Western Community College March 14, 2011

Good Evening Chairman Holsworth and members of the Independent Bipartisan Commission on Redistricting. Thank you each for your willingness to serve your fellow citizens in this important manner and for holding a public forum.

I am Molly McClenon speaking on behalf of the League of Women Voters of Virginia, a nonpartisan political organization which encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues and influences public policy through education and advocacy. A major emphasis of our activity is encouraging citizens to register, to become informed and to vote. We are, perhaps, best known for conducting debates between candidates prior to elections.

I have lived in Lynchburg for 46 years and have seen changes in the political process. We have held fewer debates recently, in part because we have had fewer elections with more than one candidate.

Elections with two or more viable candidates increase voter interest and participation in the election. Just consider our last two elections.

Lynchburg is in the 6th Congressional District but serves as a media outlet for part of the 5th. Last year the 5th was such a hotly contested election that it resulted in increased turnout even in Lynchburg. (I work the polls and we had folks who had come just to vote for one of the candidates in the 5th district!)

Lynchburg is in the 23rd House District, a seat long held by one party. But there has been a change of delegate in each of the last three house elections and an increase in voter participation. While I might like you to draw the lines to favor my preferred candidate, for the sake of the health of the Commonwealth, please use other criteria than favoring one party or the other.

Next I will address another of the significant effects of non-competitive or safe districts - their contribution to the increasing polarization in legislative bodies. As quoted in the LWV-VA study, "Does Your Vote Really Count," "with little reason to fear voters, representatives increasingly cater to party insiders and donors rather than to the political center . . . ; bipartisan compromise around moderate policies takes a backseat to party loyalty, resulting in historic levels of polarization." This is certainly true of the Virginia General Assembly in recent years. The gerrymandered districts established in the 2001

redistricting have resulted in the election of candidates who are unwilling to compromise on legislation, the budget and transportation issues and funding.

In addition to the Virginia constitutional requirement of equal population, contiguous and compact districts and the Voting Rights Act requirements for protecting the voting strength of minority groups, the League of Women Voters of Virginia supports the following considerations in redistricting:

- Natural geographic boundaries;
- Jurisdictional boundaries;
- Communities of interest; and
- Competitiveness

Again, we thank Governor McDonald for appointing the commission and you for your willingness to serving. We thank you for holding these hearings and for listening to us and other citizens of the Commonwealth.

One last item:

The League is hosting a reception for the winners of the University Student Redistricting Contest. It will be at the Library of Virginia, 800 East Broad Street, Richmond, on Tuesday March 22, from 2 to 5 p.m., that is a week from tomorrow. The event is free and open to the public. The winning maps will be on display. Refreshments will be served. The contest judges will be in attendance. All members of the Commission are encouraged to attend. And the public is also welcome and invited. So we hope that all of you here tonight will consider attending.

Molly McClenon
March 14, 2011