



# The League of Women Voters of Virginia

P.O. Box 621  
Centreville, VA 20122-0621  
[www.LWV-VA.org](http://www.LWV-VA.org)

## Statement of Carol Noggle, League of Women Voters of Virginia, to the Virginia Independent Bipartisan Advisory Commission on Redistricting Capitol Building, Richmond March 11, 2011

Good afternoon, Chairman Holsworth and Members of the Commission. I am Carol Noggle of Gainesville. Today I am speaking for the Virginia League of Women Voters. It is very gratifying and encouraging to us that Virginia citizens have this unique historic-making opportunity to expand participation in the redistricting process.

Proper redistricting is basic to the constitutional right of fairness and equal representation for all citizens so this reform pilot project can be the start to overcome deficiencies in Virginia's election process.

Given past instances of non-competitive districts, such as the 2009 election where 30 of 100 House candidates were incumbents with no opposition, and such as instances where incumbents were noticeably protected, through several elections, so that citizens doubted that their votes counted, it has long been known that changes are needed. If all the proposed plans – those produced by Mr. McDonald for the commission, the College competition plans, and those from the General Assembly joint committee — can be presented to the public for comparison, the degree of transparency in government will be greatly increased and result in increased public awareness, confidence in government, and engagement. Just the recent announcement of Mr. McDonald's redistricting plan piqued public interest ... and that of legislators. This interest is the beginning of evidence to dispute the skepticism that this commission cannot influence or improve the end product.

We urge you to display the plans and the rationale of new boundary lines throughout the state as quickly as possible.

We urge you to have a vigorous exchange of ideas when you present the plans to the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House, the Chairmen of the House and Senate Privileges and Elections Committees, and the Governor.

No doubt you have fully realized the Challenges in Redistricting including, but not limited to, how to identify and preserve communities of interest, how to accommodate special populations that have increased in size, how to keep areas with low population density at a reasonable geographical size, how to shift voters to new districts as needed, how to avoid moving incumbents out of their present districts, how to find ways to alter "safe" districts fairly, and how to alter previously gerrymandered districts.

In my area there is a non-contiguous precinct within a county magisterial district that has a very irregular boundary that can easily be construed as gerrymandering – even more irregular than the original salamander. The precinct is actually divided by part of a neighboring town and a railroad track.

If the bipartisan redistricting commission work results in any one of several benefits such as more competitive races that give voters more options, more candidates to challenge previously unopposed

incumbents, a decreased polarization in the legislature and the likelihood of more bipartisan compromise, increased voter turnout, and increased citizen engagement – then success occurred. When a voter is asked the question, “Does My Vote Count?”, the answer can be “Yes!”

We also suggest that the commission continue to function throughout this year so that you can analyze together this year’s General Assembly races and the results of the November election to look especially for how competitive the races are, and what the level of voter turnout is, in comparison to past years.

If this independent bipartisan advisory commission at the state level is successful it can serve as a model for Virginia counties and cities to follow. This commission’s success will also be setting the stage for a bipartisan redistricting commission to serve 10 years from now.

The League of Women Voters of Virginia thank you for your dedication to this task.

Carol Noggle  
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