



2021 Issue Paper: Redistricting

Position Summary

The League of Women Voters of Washington supports fully funded redistricting processes and enforceable standards that promote timely, fair, and effective representation at all levels of government. We support equitable access and policies that maximum opportunities for participation.

Process

Every 10 years, the voting boundary drawing process, called *redistricting*, determines the political representation of all our communities. The formation of congressional, legislative, and local districts is fundamental to the equity in our voting system. How and where district lines are drawn in 2021 will determine how strong a voice each voter has in elections through 2032. Stories of partisan and racial gerrymandering, of overwhelming majorities in districts, and of single-party control in state governments elevate concerns about the effectiveness of our representative democracy. In 2019, the U.S. Supreme Court declined to rule on partisan gerrymandering—this means that effective state laws are critical.

Equitable redistricting will depend on local action. A growing number of states have shifted the job of redrawing district lines to special commissions or made changes to reduce the potential for partisan gerrymandering. Washington is one of only 10 states that has a redistricting commission independent from legislative control.

How Redistricting Works in Washington

After decades of intense battles, Washington State created a five-member [Redistricting Commission](#) in 1983. The bipartisan commission requires three of four voting members to agree. The four voting commissioners are chosen by the majority and minority caucus leaders in the House and the Senate of the Washington State Legislature. These four then choose a nonvoting administrative chair. The resulting maps can only be amended by the legislature with a two-thirds majority vote in both chambers and then only with a change that is less than 2% by population. The governor does not have a role. If the commission fails to agree on maps, then the Washington Supreme Court draws maps, usually with the help of outside experts. The commission is appointed by January 15 and must be finished by November 15 of the year ending in 1.

Over the last three decades, the commission process has created many noncompetitive districts, seemed to favor incumbents, and resulted in close majority control in our legislative chambers. While the process eliminates extreme partisan gerrymandering, it seems that

Republicans and Democrats are dividing up the state into winnable districts for each party. Only about 20% of legislative races are won with less than 55% of the votes and about 10% of the legislative races are uncontested. The process can be improved to increase trust, transparency, representation, and effectiveness.

In 2011, The Washington State Redistricting Commission held 18 meetings for public input in addition to receiving written input through its website. The LWVWA's analysis showed only 674 community members and nonprofit representatives attended these meetings. The League heard from past commissioners that much of this testimony was not helpful. We believe if we make our testimony more coherent, powerful, and compelling, then we can make it easy for commissioners to take action on our input. Testimony for the 2021 commission is likely to be virtual. This will allow greater opportunity for all residents to provide input.

The LWVWA was instrumental in drafting HB 2575, which passed the Washington House of Representative in the 2020 session. This bill focused on modernizing our redistricting process, increasing transparency, maximizing input from the public, and ensuring access for non-English speakers. The failure of this bill shows us how critical it is to testify to the commission and tell our legislators we want a transparent and accountable redistricting process.

The LWVWA is part of the national League's [People Powered Fair Maps](#) campaign, which is focused on creating fair voting districts in all 50 states. In 2021, the Washington campaign consists of [Speak Up Schools](#) and creating legislative and congressional map solutions backed by a wide variety of organizations.

Issue Details for 2021

For 2021, redistricting reform focuses on the 2021 Washington State Redistricting Commission itself. We are working to improved trust, transparency, representation, and overall effectiveness of the commission and its processes. We must inform the commission directly of the need for transparency and accountability and maximum opportunity for civic participation by the widest variety of people.

2021 Speak Up Schools

Speak Up Schools are powerful training sessions to inspire effective testimony to the 2021 Washington State Redistricting Commission. Speak Up Schools will improve the quality, content, and diversity of community input. These workshops will encourage a wide range of people to testify by sharing tools to help participants find their own voice and to build effective, personal testimony. With wide participation we will:

- Host 15 Speak Up Schools around the state between February and April 2021.
- Have over 2,000 people testify to the commission during public meetings in mid-2021.
- Hold the 2021 commission accountable by publicly documenting mapping solutions that match the desires of a wide variety of communities of interest within Washington State.

2021 Redistricting Maps built on community input

The LWVWA will submit a set of proposed maps to the Redistricting Commission around June 2021; these maps are based on input we receive from people across the state. These district maps will follow the legal criteria of redistricting: equal population, coincide with political subdivisions, convenient, contiguous, compact, provide fair and effective representation, encourage electoral competition, and not be drawn to favor or discriminate against any party or group. The League of Women Voters will make maps that:

- Balance voting power to a satisfactory level for all major communities of interest.
- Provide an opportunity for the most people to feel they can elect their desired candidate.

We will work with the [Washington Voting Justice Coalition](#) and many other organizations to create maps with our collective priorities. With media attention, we can hold the commission accountable to our solution.

Take Action

- **Host a Speak Up School, winter 2021:** The LWVWA's [Speak Up School](#) team can assist any organization to host a school. The Speak Up School site provides information on hosting a school, partnering, and the benefits to you, your organization, and your participants. This is a wonderful opportunity to strengthen partnerships with diverse coalitions who want equitable representation.
- **Attend a Speak Up School, spring 2021:** LWV local Leagues and ally organizations will host Speak Up Schools to encourage people to testify and improve the quality, content, and diversity of input to our commissioners. Check the Speak Up School page or your local league to register for these workshops.
- **Join a mapping party:** We need your input for our maps. The LWVWA Redistricting Team will be holding 20 focus groups around Washington State in winter 2021 to discuss the best locations for district lines. Contact Alison McCaffree at amccaffree@lwvwa.org to be part of a discussion in your area.
- **Testify to the 2021 Washington State Redistricting Commission:** Everyone should testify to the commission in person (virtually) or in writing. We anticipate opportunities in May/June and August/September 2021. Please advocate for your community's needs by telling the commission which areas should go in which districts and why.

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