

Drawing a Line for Democracy



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF INDIANAPOLIS**



*ENSURING THAT VOTERS CHOOSE THEIR LEGISLATORS
INSTEAD OF LEGISLATORS CHOOSING THEIR VOTERS*

RETHINKING REDISTRICTING: DRAWING A LINE FOR DEMOCRACY

REDISTRICTING WITHOUT GERRYMANDERING

The current process of drawing legislative district maps allows legislators to determine those borders, a process that may produce strangely-shaped outlines, enclosing voters of only one type. This practice is referred to as *gerrymandering*. Gerrymandered districts ensure safe districts for those in power and create significant disadvantage for the minority party. Gerrymandered maps undermine the one person, one vote concept of our democracy. Elections held in gerrymandered districts are often non-competitive, ensure the status quo of those already in power, deepen polarization, and weaken the democratic process. A simple solution would be to create an **independent redistricting commission**. At first glance, this seems like an idea that everyone would support. However, that is not the case. Gerrymandering has become a “spoil” of victory, and both major political parties take advantage of the current system.

WORKING TOWARD AN INDEPENDENT COMMISSION

Every ten years following the census, the Indiana General Assembly and local governments are required to review all districts and to redraw lines as needed. The next census occurs in 2020. To move from the current practice of gerrymandering to a process of neutral redistricting, the Indiana Constitution must be changed. For this to happen, bills must be drafted and passed in the 2014 General Assembly and affirmed in the 2015 General Assembly. The final step would be a statewide referendum prior to the next census. **Legislators need to hear from constituents now, or the process will not be initiated, and Indiana will miss the window of opportunity for creating positive change.**

HOSTING CONVERSATIONS THAT RAISE AWARENESS

Democracy depends on an informed and engaged citizenry. We need your help in raising awareness about the importance of this issue. Creating an independent commission requires our legislators to stand behind the idea of an independent redistricting commission and to work to make it happen. They will do this only if they realize it is important to Indiana voters. Common Cause and League of Women Voters are collaborating in this *Rethinking Redistricting* campaign and need your help to host conversations to discuss this topic. Legislators must hear from voters prior to the 2014 General Assembly. This packet is your resource to help raise awareness about rethinking redistricting and to ensure that Indiana voters, rather than political parties, are represented by those who draw the lines.

Thank you for supporting this important cause.

PLANNING CONVERSATION CIRCLES

Purpose: To urge Indiana legislators to create an independent redistricting commission for Indiana

WHAT IS A CONVERSATION CIRCLE?

- A relaxed occasion in a person's home or at a venue comfortable for talking together
- A gathering of 5 to 10 friends or acquaintances
- A group of people interested in fair elections, especially with regard to voting districts
- An opportunity to spend an hour or two discussing opinions and/or taking action
- An event during which the host presents the benefits of independently-drawn districts

WHY ORGANIZE FOR SUCH CONVERSATIONS?

- Democracy suffers when legislative districts are shaped to match partisan concerns
- With gerrymandering, each party works to establish safe (rather than competitive) districts.
- Unless a swell of citizen support for independently drawn districts emerges now, the General Assembly will take no action before the next required adjustment (2020 census).

WHEN WILL CONVERSATION CIRCLES HAPPEN?

- From mid- September through mid-November 2013 on various dates

WHO SHOULD BE INVITED?

- Each host should assemble a guest list.
- Those invited might be one's friends or simply one's acquaintances.
- Those invited might share a common membership or interest.
- Ideally, guests would have varied political leanings and be willing to examine differences.

HOW DOES ONE PREPARE TO HOST A CONVERSATION CIRCLE?

- Select the place, date, and time based on your own and your guests' schedules.
- 2 weeks in advance: Send postal or email invitations to 2-3 times as many guests as you expect to gather. Request replies by one week out. If the site has wireless capabilities, invite guests to bring a laptop or tablet.
- 1 week in advance: Telephone the people who have not responded, urging them to let you know that they are coming.
- 4 days in advance: Decide what, if any, refreshments to serve. Gather supplies.
- 2 days in advance: Assemble legislators' names and addresses, pens, paper, envelopes, stamps, "Talking Points," and "Calendar of Events" (from this resource packet).
- 1 hour in advance: Be ready to greet your guests.

HOLDING CONVERSATION CIRCLES

HOSTING

- Create a sign-in sheet for guests. Include a space for e-addresses.
- Welcome your guests as they arrive.

THAT DAY

- Once everyone is seated, initiate introductions, starting with yourself.
- After introductions, thank everyone for coming and restate the purpose of the meeting.
- Briefly note the guidelines (You may want to have this as a handout):
 - Listen with attention
 - Speak with intention
 - Welcome differences of opinion and perspective
 - Contribute to the well-being of the whole
- Briefly share why this is an important topic for you. (Make sure that your remarks model respect, neutrality, and brevity. Be personal and non-partisan. This conversation is not about particular parties or officials; it is about the crucial nature of free elections and of representative governance.)
- Invite people briefly to explain why redistricting is important to them.
- Once those willing to share have done so, begin to point out what would be needed for Indiana to create an independent commission for the 2021 redistricting cycle. (Refer to the “Talking Points.”) Allow for responses and comments.
- Stress that the only way that an independent commission will occur is if informed and engaged citizens like themselves work to give voice to the issue.

CALL TO ACTION

- As the conversation draws to a close, briefly note that there are various ways in which each of them can make a difference. (Refer to the “Taking Action” document).
- Ask if anyone is willing to commit to one or more of the action items. Thank them for their willingness to support this effort. Briefly note what they agreed to do.

CONCLUSION

- End the meeting on time and thank everyone for attending!
- Mention that guests will get a follow-up e-mail that includes any materials that were requested.
- Within a few days, send an e-mail note, thanking them for their participation. Make special mention of those who agreed to take a particular action.
- Please copy your follow-up email to dasberry@indy.rr.com so that League of Women Voters of Indianapolis and Common Cause / Indiana can track the energy and momentum being generated.

TAKING ACTION

WHAT CAN WE DO TO ADVANCE RETHINKING REDISTRICTING IN INDIANA?

- Talk to friends/work associates/club members.
- Hold a conversation circle.
- Write, e-mail, and telephone legislators.
- Join League of Women Voters and/or Common Cause to stay involved and informed.

WHY SHOULD WE TAKE ACTION?

- Legislators won't take up this issue unless they hear from their constituents that redistricting reform is vital.
- *"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."* -- Margaret Mead

HOW DO WE TAKE ACTION?

- Letters mailed to government officials go through a screening process for toxic chemicals and may be delayed. We suggest that you contact your officials by telephone or e-mail.
- The Senate phone is 232-9400 or 1-800-382-9467, and senators' e-addresses follow this form: <S28@in.gov>. Find more information at <www.indianavoters.com>.
- The House phone is 232-9600 or 1-800-382-9842, and representatives' e-addresses follow this form: <H28@in.gov>. Find more information at <www.indianavoters.com>.
- Write out your e-mail/telephone statement in advance (sample below) so that you can send it to more than one official without re-keying.
- Find your legislators and their contact information (e-addresses, phone numbers) at www.indianavoters.com or www.in.gov/legislative/.

Sample e-mail: (Alter this to suit yourself, keeping a respectful tone.)

I am a taxpayer and voter in your district, and I am concerned about the way voting districts are drawn in our state. Currently, the party in power at the time of redistricting draws the district lines. It appears that the purpose (and result) of the current method is that incumbents are almost guaranteed re-election, rather than giving the voters a real voice. Without a real voice, why should voters feel their participation matters? Indiana has one of the lowest voter participation rates in the country. This is partly due to the voters' realization that the district lines have been drawn to guarantee that a particular party will win. Such districting helps to promote the perception that some legislators are not responsive to voter concerns because they hold "safe seats."

I would like to see a diverse, independent committee draw up the voting districts. If done properly, the results will be increased voter turn-out, enhanced competition within elections, and legislators who are more responsive to their constituents.

Please champion an independent redistricting commission in the next legislative session. The election process is a revered American institution, yet it is being eroded in Indiana by our allowing politicians to draw their own districts.

Thank you for your service and for taking up this issue!

TALKING POINTS – WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

WHY WE NEED REFORM

- Indiana's current system of having legislators draw district maps creates the ultimate conflict of interest. Because the process is highly partisan, it is unrealistic to expect politicians not to exploit it for political advantage.
- Our current system allows legislators to choose their voters, instead of voters choosing their legislators on Election Day. While population requirements must be met, lines deliberately include or exclude groups of voters based on political affiliation.
- Gerrymandered districts undermine the basic concept of one person, one vote and make it more difficult to hold our elected officials accountable. Both at Congressional and state legislative levels, gerrymandering has had a negative effect on the number of competitive districts. In 2012, only two Indiana Congressional districts were considered competitive. Out of the 125 seats that will be up for re-election in 2014, fewer than a dozen are expected to be truly in play.
- Non-competitive elections negatively affect voter turnout – already a big problem in Indiana. According to the 2011 Civic Health Index, Indiana was 48th in the nation for voter turnout.
- With a lack of competition comes polarization. Creation of “safe” gerrymandered districts often results in the election of candidates who are at the ideological edges of their party and who feel little commitment to respond to the concerns of all their constituents. Instead, they may focus on pleasing certain interest groups.
- When legislators draw the lines, the process is conducted behind closed doors and is not transparent. The lack of transparency decreases public trust in the process.

WHAT KIND OF REFORM?

- Several states do not allow legislative bodies to redistrict. Instead they create independent redistricting commissions to draw the new maps. Redistricting commissions are selected in various ways, for example, through appointments by legislative leadership or by an appointed board. It is vital to create a selection process that ensures an independent commission.
- In addition to changing what group draws district maps, Indiana must also adopt non-partisan, politically neutral criteria to guide map-makers. Criteria supported by nonprofit, nonpartisan groups usually include competition, compactness, contiguity, maintenance of communities of interest, and protection of minority voting rights.

HOW TO REFORM REDISTRICTING

- Currently the Indiana Constitution directs the Indiana General Assembly to redraw Congressional and state legislative districts after every decennial census. In order to establish an independent redistricting commission, the Indiana Constitution must be amended.
- Amending the Constitution is a complex process. It involves passing a resolution through both houses of the General Assembly twice, in separate biennia. Afterward, the issue would go to the voters in a statewide, binding referendum. If a majority of Hoosiers voters approve the referendum, then an independent commission would be established.
- In addition to amending the Constitution, legislation must be passed to put redistricting criteria into statute, creating the structure for and process of selection to the commission.

CALENDAR OF DESIRED ACTIONS

2013

- ✓ August 22 our coalition will begin contacting civic groups and organizations across Marion County. We will provide informational materials for conversation circles. Upon request, we will coach leaders.
- ✓ Mid-September through mid-November, conversation circles or house parties will occur.
- ✓ Tuesday, November 20---Organization Day for the General Assembly.
- ✓ Thursday, November 22---Mass call-in, email day for urging elected officials to support rethinking redistricting by creating an independent, nonpartisan Indiana redistricting commission.

2014

- ✓ Legislators propose and pass a resolution creating an independent redistricting commission. (Once legislation is proposed, contacting and recontacting legislators will be important.)

2015

- ✓ Indiana legislators affirm the above, creating an independent commission. Subsequently, voters approve the action in a statewide referendum.

RESOURCES AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- To find legislators' names and contact information: www.indianavoters.com or www.in.gov/legislative/

To submit an e-mail letter to the Indianapolis *Star*: stareditor@indystar.com (Include your name, address, and phone number.)

- To submit a paper letter to the Indianapolis *Star*: (Include your name, address, and phone number.)

Letters to the Editor
Indianapolis *Star*
P O Box 145
Indianapolis, IN 46206-0145

- To contact League of Women Voters of Indianapolis or Common Cause / Indiana with comments or questions concerning the Rethinking Redistricting campaign and *Drawing a Line for Democracy*:

Debbie Asberry, dasberry@indy.rr.com or
Julia Vaughn, jvaughn@commoncause.org

- To visit our organizations' web sites:

League of Women Voters of Indiana www.lwvin.org
League of Women Voters of Indianapolis www.lwvindy.org
Common Cause/Indiana www.commoncause.org/in

- To read a scholarly article on the status of transatlantic democracies: *The Democratic Disconnect: Citizenship and Accountability in the Transatlantic Community* <www.transatlanticacademy.org>