



Wednesday, September 20th, 2023

Re: Assembly Bill 415: Relating to: legislative redistricting.

Michelle Ramirez-White – Policy Coordinator, Wisconsin Farmers Union

Wisconsin Farmers Union's grassroots, member-driven policy reads:

“Wisconsin Farmers Union supports the creation of a nonpartisan entity to perform all future redistricting for city, county, state and federal offices in the state of Wisconsin. Such a commission should conduct redistricting according to logical geographical and jurisdictional boundaries, striving to keep communities of interest intact.”

In response to the redistricting bill introduced by the Wisconsin Legislature, the Wisconsin Farmers Union is advocating for this bill to be given a public hearing and go through the committee process where vital input from stakeholders of both major parties and non-partisan groups can be examined. WFU pushes the bill authors to strive for a stronger non-partisan effort to address our partisan map-drawing process.

Wisconsin Farmers Union applauds elected officials who genuinely seek solutions to end gerrymandered maps in our state, but we do not want our members, who have long advocated for fair representation, to be misled by this bill's content. Under the current version of the bill, the majority of the Legislature can reject the maps, and if rejected twice, can then draw the maps to their own specifications. Additionally, our Legislative Reference Bureau (LRB), the entity charged with drawing WI's maps, would not be guaranteed full independence under the drafting process, and the bill does not prohibit lobbyists and other donors from working on the redistricting process. This is a far cry from a non-partisan third party driven effort and, if implemented in its current form, could actually push Wisconsin further in the wrong direction.

Lastly, this bill bypassed referral to a standing committee review and a public hearing. This, in practice, is concerning, and lacks to uphold the democratic processes we have in our state and further calls into question the author's principles of transparency and accountability -which are vital when drafting a good-faith effort of fair non-partisan maps for Wisconsin.

“The process is very concerning, Farmers Union members have wanted to see change in our maps for over a decade, and it's important we get it right and have proper representation in Madison”
Darin Von Ruden, President of Wisconsin Farmers Union.

Additionally, WFU supports redistricting legislation in the form of a constitutional amendment. If passed, no political party will be able to unfairly change the maps again. The amendment requires adoption by two successive legislatures, and ratification by the people, before it can become effective.

Therefore, without critical nonpartisan safeguards and an open and transparent process including a public hearing, Wisconsin Farmers Union cannot support this bill as written.

Wisconsin Farmers Union is a member-driver organization that is committed to enhancing the quality of life for family farmers, rural communities and all people through education, cooperation, and legislation. Learn more at <https://www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com/>