



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF WISCONSIN EDUCATION FUND

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July 13, 2011

To: Assembly Committee on Homeland Security and State Affairs
Senate Committee on Judiciary, Utilities, Commerce and Government Operations

From: Andrea Kaminski, Executive Director, League of Women Voters of Wisconsin Education Fund

Re: Opposition to SB148, SB149 and SB150

Each decade the new census data are used to draw up new voting districts to equitably distribute political representation as our population changes. In Wisconsin this task is delegated to the state legislature, which time and again has proven it is unable to complete the task at a reasonable cost and free from private interest and partisan manipulation. Ever concerned with equal representation and electoral integrity, the League of Women Voters regularly devotes much attention to reapportionment and redistricting. As a nonpartisan citizen organization, the League represents no special interest but the general well-being and political representation of the people of the State of Wisconsin.

As in decades past, state and local League activities in Wisconsin in the past 18 months have included monitoring the redistricting process, testifying before local redistricting bodies, supporting reform legislation, sponsoring public forums around the state, and working with other groups to shine a light on the redistricting process. There are League members serving on county redistricting committees, and two League members recently filed a petition in Brown County Circuit Court with a plan to maintain the county's supervisory districts at 26 rather than increase that number by 3 districts.

At the state level, the League has advocated since 1981 to have a nonpartisan or bipartisan entity draw new congressional and legislative district maps, starting with proposals crafted by local governments.

What is being proposed in the bills before us today is not simply a matter of flouting some of the technicalities in our laws and traditions. Rather, these proposals turn our state's process of governing into a charade and weaken its foundation. The strength of our form of government stems from the people believing that their elected representatives have the public's interest at heart, not personal interests. These proposals defy that principle.

More specifically, we offer the following comments about the proposals addressed in today's hearing:

1. The process and timing outlined in these bills show no respect for the local government officials and citizens who have been working for weeks to develop local redistricting plans. Traditionally, and by law, they are allowed to develop local district maps before the state legislature weighs in. Yet SB148 and SB149 propose specific district maps and simply state that if the local district lines are not consistent with those of the state, the local governments will have to adapt at their own expense. These bills change the rules midstream and are an affront to the people who know their communities the best.
2. The League does not believe for a minute that it is a coincidence that these maps were released on the Friday afternoon before the first of a series of recall elections. As if it is not bad enough that voters and local officials had to adapt in a few short weeks to a restrictive new election law, now the sponsors of

these bills are turning the traditionally grassroots redistricting process upside-down with a top-down, big-government proposal in the midst of the recall elections. The shameful result – and we believe the purpose – is to further confuse voters and suppress participation in the elections.

3. Wisconsin's elections over the past 15 years have shown our state to be evenly divided politically. Most Wisconsinites are independent voters. Any redistricting map should reflect the *tenor* of the state, not the *tenure* of current elected officials. The goal should be to provide the best possible representation for citizens, who by the way are tired of elected officials who are so polarized they cannot work together without spurring multiple recall elections.
4. We urge you not to rush this once-a-decade process for the sake of partisan gain. Properly noticed public hearings at all levels around the state, open meetings and full transparency are essential so that citizens can participate and have faith in the outcome. In addition, citizens should have time to consider alternative maps, developed by nonpartisan groups, which offer legitimately drawn districts that preserve compactness, contiguity, communities of interest, substantial equality of population and, last but not least, greater competitiveness.

Lest you think that the League of Women Voters is criticizing the proposed plan because of partisan preference, I assure you that for decades we have advocated to place the redistricting process in the hands of a nonpartisan entity. We have in our office a 1989 letter from then Assembly Majority Leader Dave Travis who assailed the League for being "pro-Republican." At least in the past, redistricting has been carried out with a divided legislature, which resulted in a modicum of balance. The fact is that while control of the legislature has changed, our position has not.

The need for nonpartisan redistricting is only made more obvious by the poorly-timed introduction of the clearly gerrymandered districts in SB148 and SB149. We urge you to reject these proposals and make this year's redistricting process one you can be proud to tell your grandchildren about in the future.

Thank you.