

6/15/2020

Testimony on CR-94

Good evening, Councilmembers. I'm Carolan Stansky, a 30+ year resident of Ellicott City.

I was a member of the Charter Review Commission (CRC), but these comments are my own.

Before being appointed to the CRC, I had never read the Howard County Charter during my many years working on neighborhood and countywide issues. I assume most citizens, including our HS graduates, have not read those 41 dense pages of our Charter. I was most surprised by Section [202(f)] about Council Redistricting following each decennial US census. The HoCo Charter essentially gives almost complete control over new district lines to appointees of the Central Committee of each major party. Wow. This must change. Howard is an outlier; I didn't find such a gift of political power in the Charters of our neighboring Maryland counties with the Charter form of government.

I am a life-long independent voter, technically unaffiliated (UNA). Now, I might be able to compete for one seat on the Redistricting Committee, but I believe CR-94 would shut out voters like me entirely. That's wrong. I acknowledge that both the current charter and CR-94 leave the final decision of district lines to the Council—but that might be quite a "hot potato" at times and it might seem "better" for the Council to "just accept" a citizens' committee recommendation. But was that committee unbiased? Are their decisions transparent and fair? Was the goal equitable division of residents or were lines drawn to maintain or increase political influence?

One task given to the CRC was to ensure that the Charter language is appropriate for "contemporary government." [202(f)] is far from the anti-gerrymandering "contemporary" sentiment which favors independent redistricting panels. Last summer, the Supreme Court majority ruled that the issue of gerrymandered congressional districts was "not justiciable" and proclaimed that issues must be resolved by the individual states. The issue is real. You can—and should—be part of the solution. Please read that SCOTUS decision about the infamous MD and NC congressional district lines; nowhere do the Justices say "gerrymandering is OK" as has been stated by some.

CR-94 suggests a change, but not the right one. I do not support it. Instead, I urge the Council to amend this bill and use the language in the CRC report dated April 30, 2020 to modify the Councilmanic Redistricting Commission to reduce partisan influence:

- **the Council will appoint seven members** [now it could be 4 to 13 members; CR-94 states "at least" seven but does not set a limit; how large is too large and unmanageable?]

-**from a list of applicants** [redistricting members should NOT be central committee controlled or influenced; I would have little chance as UNA under current language and no chance with the proposed language of CR94; Please let fair-minded Howard County citizens apply!]

- **no more than three members may be from the same political party** [now, if only 4 members, one party would control; there are no restrictions in CR94 nor any real chance for UNAs—yikes!]

-no person shall be eligible for appointment to the Commission who holds elective office, or any office with a political party or resides in the same household of any such person [now there is only a restriction on elected office which CR94 retains; sadly, other Maryland counties are far ahead of Howard in removing this real possibility of partisan conflict!]

As of May 31, 2020 Howard voter registration was 224,619 voters: 51.8%DEM, 23.9%REP, and 24.3%UNA+other). Past Supreme Court decisions specifically state proportionality is not required in districting. However, fairness is required; unfairness must be eliminated from the process. Frankly, let the computer do it! The redistricting committee, and then the Council, should review multiple map runs for potential bias that could/should be removed from districts. Let's start the 2021 process with the 1860 Martenet Howard County map—it shows 5 reasonable geographic districts.

Inaction by the Maryland legislature on Governor Hogan's proposal for independent redistricting commissions in the pandemic-shortened 2020 Session should not provide "cover" for any delay in addressing this issue in Howard County. Let's lead in this area as we seek to do in many others!

Sayers, Margery

From: Cynthia Williams <cawilliams66@hotmail.com>
Sent: Monday, June 8, 2020 5:59 PM
To: CouncilMail
Subject: CR94-2020

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The League of Women Voters of Howard County is pleased to offer its criteria for fair councilmanic redistricting based on the position of the League of Women Voters of the United States, which is applicable to all levels of government. Fair redistricting is a high priority for the League (CR94-2020).

The LWVHC is supportive of the Charter Review Commission's recommendations to remove political influence in the process by eliminating the Central Committee's role. Below are our recommendations for accomplishing that goal.

Responsibility for redistricting should be invested in an independent special commission, with membership that reflects the diversity of the County, including citizens at large, representatives of public interest groups, and members of minority groups, chosen by the County Council from a list of qualified volunteers.

The standards on which a redistricting plan is based must require substantially equal population, geographic contiguity, and effective representation of racial minorities. A plan should provide for promotion of partisan fairness, preservation of "communities of interest".

A plan must explicitly reject protection of incumbents or protection and preferential treatment for a political party through such devices as considering party affiliation, voting history and candidate residence.

Thank you for your consideration of this bold plan.

Cynthia Williams
President
League of Women Voters of Howard County