

Sayers, Margery

From: Tierra Bradford <TBradford@commoncause.org>
Sent: Sunday, July 5, 2020 4:49 PM
To: CouncilMail
Subject: Common Cause Maryland Testimony Submission
Attachments: Testimony on CR 94.pdf

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Hello,

I am submitting written testimony on behalf of Common Cause Maryland for tomorrows legislative session. We are in support of legislation CR-94.

Thank you very much,

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July 6, 2020

**Testimony on CR94
Independent Redistricting Commission
Howard County Council**

Position: Favorable w/ Amendment

Common Cause Maryland supports CR 94, a bill that would amend the county charter to allow for the creation of an independent county redistricting commission. This legislation would reform the current process by taking redistricting out of the hands of political parties.

Maryland draws new districts every ten years to update the maps for population changes. The next set of district lines will be redrawn in 2021. The district maps that are created are supposed to reflect the ideal of “one person, one vote.”

Common Cause Maryland strongly believes that the redistricting commission should be structured to maintain a balance of political interests. This will minimize the risk of conflict of interests among the members and preserve the “one person, one vote” ideal.

Redistricting is more than just a partisan concern. When county districts cut through our neighborhoods, and communities for partisan gain, the voice of those communities are fractured. The accountability between elected officials and their constituents is equally fragmented. Redistricting should be done in a way that best reflects and protects the interests of the voters, not the interests of outside forces who benefit from the lines being drawn a certain way.

Additionally, Common Cause Maryland is in support of the following amendments to CR 94:

- The commission should hold at least two public hearings on their redistricting plan, during various times of the day
- The commission shall consider the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and protect communities of interest when developing the plan of Councilmanic Districts
- Members of the commission should reasonably reflect the geographic, racial, ethnic, gender, and age diversity of the County
- No commission member can be a candidate for elective office or holds elective office or resides in the same household of any such person, who is a political party officer, a registered lobbyist, or staff of a current elected official, a consultant to a current elected official, or who is an immediate family member or household member of a current elected official.

- No commission member is eligible who has donated \$2,500 or more to a candidate for elective office in the preceding forty-eight months

Voting Rights Act & Protecting Communities of Interest

The VRA was initially passed to overcome legal barriers at the state and local levels that prevented Black people from exercising their right to vote under the Fifteenth Amendment of the Constitution. Since then, this Civil Rights Legislation is used as a protection against discriminatory voting and elections policies that impact racial and language minorities. If this Amendment is included and a proposed redistricting map violates the VRA, the lines must be redrawn regardless of whether they are compact or contiguous. Although all redistricting maps must comply with the VRA, adding this language to the state constitution would ensure Maryland is continuing to protect vulnerable communities.

Conclusion

It is critical that election districts conform to standards that are both politically neutral and respectful of communities of voters. Howard County is considered a leader on democracy reforms and should continue to lead by taking a meaningful step toward fixing the current redistricting process. Passage of CR94 would demonstrate to all Howard County residents that their representatives respect their right to have an equal voice in our democratic process, and that they are proactive about protecting that right.

We urge a favorable report.



Sayers, Margery

From: LINDA Wengel <lwengel@msn.com>
Sent: Wednesday, June 24, 2020 9:57 PM
To: CouncilMail
Subject: Fwd: LWVHC TESTIMONY ON CR 94-2020

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

A reminder of the League's testimony largely in support of the Charter Review Commission's recommendation.

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.

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.

Linda Wengel
Action Chair
League of Women Voters of Howard County

Sayers, Margery

From: Angie Boyter <angie.boyter@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, June 18, 2020 2:11 PM
To: CouncilMail
Subject: CR94-2020 Testimony Redistricting
Attachments: CR94-2020 Testimony Redistricting.docx

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Dear Councilmembers,

I regret that I had not realized that this bill had been introduced and has already been heard in time to give formal testimony, but I consider it very important and wanted to write to express my support of it with some amendments. The details are attached.

Angie Boyter

Testimony on CR94-2020

Redistricting

I consider this resolution to be perhaps the most significant recommendation for charter revision that is before you, and I support it with the addition of two important amendments.

I need not repeat the concerns about gerrymandering at all levels of redistricting, and I believe we need to do everything we can to assure that the primary objective of districts in our local elections is to represent geographic and demographic elements of the population, not to maximize the strength of a particular political party. To show the need for this, I would just like to recount a conversation I had with a Redistricting Commission member during the last redistricting. I had some ideas I wanted to share on ways to achieve the objectives of a good district. That member replied that he had only one objective, and that was to elect members of his party. I hope you will agree that this should not be the objective of a redistricting commission member, but it is what you are likely to get under the current system. Currently all but one of the redistricting commission members are nominated by the central committee of parties getting at least 25% of the vote for county executive in the last election. The council then (without a chance to reject any nominee) confirms those nominees and adds one more member. First of all, if we had a landslide election one year, there would only be one party eligible to nominate members, and the commission would only have four members. More likely, there would be nominees from the two major central committees. I have great respect for a number of central committee members, but their job, legitimately, is to elect members of their own party. They should not be the ones selecting the people who draw district lines, because they would naturally favor highly partisan members.

The council, while elected in a partisan election, owe allegiance to all the voters and to broader issues and would be more likely to name active, interested but ideally less partisan citizens. I support the concept that the council would solicit the public to apply and would nominate and vote on applicants. It is inappropriate, I believe, to specify in the Charter that the central committees must submit nominees, especially since it is not clear in CR 94 whether the council can consider additional nominees or is bound by the party nominations.

The method of nominating and selecting commission members is the most important issue, but I am concerned also that the proposed charter amendment does not specify the size of the commission. Seven members sounds like a good number, NOT the unlimited size the bill currently provides, and there should be requirements that no more than 3 members be of the same party.

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