



Honorable Duane Quam
Chair, Elections Finance and Government Operations Committee
Minnesota House of Representatives
Pat.Kaluza@house.mn.gov

Re: Statement in Support of House File 550

Chair Quam and Members of the Committee:

Clean Elections Minnesota (“CEM”) respectfully submits this statement in support of HF 550 to the extent that it proposes an amendment to the Minnesota Constitution creating a redistricting commission. CEM is a nonprofit-nonpartisan organization working for a healthy and inclusive democracy. Our work promotes every American’s right to participate in the democratic process and we endorse the notion that while not all Minnesotans agree on everything, we all should believe in American Democracy.

We commend Representative Paul Torkelson for taking a lead in this effort by introducing HF 550.

CEM supports establishment of an **independent** redistricting commission because elections should be decided by voters, not by the politicians competing for the support of those very same voters. The foundation of our Democracy, our long-standing chosen system of governance, is the proposition that each and every one of us have value; that each and every one of us has a say; that each and every one of us - if we are truly to be free – has the right to be heard; that each and every one of us has the right – indeed the obligation – to vote and to have that vote counted.

Truly independent redistricting commissions are state-based solutions that change the system of drawing electoral maps to a more open process that is reflective of citizen voices. CEM believes this helps make politicians more accountable and responsive to their constituents.

But in many states, politicians draw their own district lines in order to pick their own voters, marginalize others, and protect themselves on reelection. This practice has had the greatest negative impact on those who historically or currently are overlooked or excluded from civic involvement and are limited in exercising an equal right to vote.

Well, the trend is changing. Today more than 21 states have some form of non-partisan or bipartisan redistricting commissions, and although some have had hiccups the reforms still work better than when maps were drawn in secret, behind closed doors.



Citizens are tired of waiting for the courts to act and do not believe politicians will ever fix the problem of gerrymandering. An independent redistricting commission is a way to put gerrymandering on the ballot. This will be a check on the redistricting process

In January 2019, the nonprofit pro-Democracy think tank Campaign Legal Center released a bipartisan poll¹ conducted by a Democratic firm, ALG Research, and a Republican firm, GS Strategy Group, that found strong opposition to gerrymandering among likely 2020 general election voters and broad, bipartisan support for the creation of independent redistricting commissions, which voters supported in all five states where it was put to a vote in the 2018 cycle. At least 60 percent of Democrats, Independents and Republicans support the creation of independent redistricting commissions. When asked to choose whether boundaries for legislative and congressional districts should be drawn by state legislatures or by an independent redistricting commission, voters favor the latter by a nearly three-to-one margin.

In July 2018 the Brennan Center for Justice released research into redistricting commissions after interviews of more than 100 stakeholders in seven jurisdictions.² They found “a compelling case that putting commissions in charge of redistricting can significantly reduce many of the worst abuses associated with redistricting and improve outcomes and satisfaction across the stakeholder spectrum — but only if commissions are carefully designed and structured to promote independence and incentivize discussion and compromise.”

Based on its research, the Brennan Center recommended reforms to maximize the independence and effectiveness of these commissions:

- An independent selection process coupled with an element of randomness.
- Clear criteria for map drawing.
- A commission of nine to 15 members to ensure diversity and guard against deadlock.
- Map-approval rules requiring support from each major political block.
- Strong transparency that make commission proceedings accessible and assessable.
- An enforceable guarantee of adequate funding for its operations.
- A timeframe allowing for public hearings, obtaining feedback, making necessary adjustments, and drawing final maps.

CEM endorses these principles in any legislation establishing a redistricting commission for Minnesota. We also support the additional following principles, and urge legislators to consider them as HF 550 moves through the legislative process:

¹ New Bipartisan Poll Shows Support for Supreme Court to Establish Clear Rules for Gerrymandering, campaignlegal.org/press-releases/new-bipartisan-poll-shows-support-supreme-court-establish-clear-rules-gerrymandering

² Redistricting Commissions: What Works, brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/redistricting-commissions-what-works



- Compliance with the federal Voting Rights Act.
- Not disproportionately favoring any political party or incumbent.
- Respecting communities of interest.
- Respecting county, city, and township lines.
- Geographic compactness.
- Contiguity of districts.
- Equal population representation.

We join with the League of Women Voters in urging creation of an independent redistricting commission in Minnesota that reflects best practices and lessons learned from across the country, and can be supported by all stakeholders, especially by those of impacted or marginalized communities.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David F. Fisher". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

David F. Fisher
Strategic Advisor
On behalf of Clean Elections Minnesota