



February 21, 2025

Chair & Representative Duane Quam
House Elections Finance and Government Operations Committee
c/o Pat Kaluza, Committee Administrator
Room G23, Minnesota State Capitol
75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Re: Testimony for HF

Dear Chair Quam and Members of the House Elections Finance and Government Operations Committee,

The League of Women Voters of Minnesota (LWVMN) is proud to be nonpartisan, neither supporting nor opposing candidates or political parties at any level of government, but always working on vital issues of concern to members and the public, and supporting the voters of Minnesota. Together, we envision a democracy where our **government is representative, accountable and responsive** to the interests and concerns of all communities and voters.

At the heart of our defense of democracy is our **commitment to redistricting processes and enforceable standards that promote fair and effective representation of voters at all levels of government with the maximum opportunity for transparency and public participation.** To that end, we have been actively involved in supporting full census counts and people-powered fair maps for all Minnesotans for decades, most recently through our active participation in the Minnesota Census Mobilization Partnership, the Our Maps Minnesota campaign, and the Minnesota Census and Democracy Partnership - all convened by the Minnesota Council on Foundations.

We appreciate the author's effort to address the existing, dysfunctional approach to redistricting in Minnesota. For the last 4 redistricting cycles, dating to 1992, the courts have created Minnesota's redistricting plans because the legislature and governor could not agree on maps. While the lack of a governing trifecta by either party spared the state from an extreme partisan gerrymander, the courts are constrained in their ability to address the changing interests and demographics of Minnesota.

LWVMN has significant reservations with the approach to redistricting proposed in HF 550. Chief among these are:

- Composition/Membership: The proposed commission will be composed of individuals appointed by legislative leadership. There is no prohibition on political party committee members, consultants, or

lobbyists. Voters/citizens, whose interests are to be represented by the redistricting plan, are not included in this body. As a result, this will be a process of, by, and for the partisan political parties. Experience in other states indicates that when political parties control the redistricting process, they tend to undermine, subvert or manipulate the process for partisan benefit, or obstruct the process creating a deadlock. Recent experience in New York, Ohio, Virginia, and Washington are all examples from the most recent redistricting cycle where courts have had to intervene in the redistricting process for these reasons.

- **Principles:** The proposed redistricting principles used are narrow and do not reflect the substantial progress made by the MN Supreme Court have over the last 30 years of doing redistricting in Minnesota. While the courts still adhere to a "least change approach", the principles used in the most recent redistricting cycle made significant strides in recognizing the legal standing and interests of specific groups such as Native Americans and minority groups, and making preservation of communities of interest a high priority.
- **Public Input and Participation:** The provision for public hearings lacks specific requirements regarding the number, location, and manner of the hearings. In addition, there is no provision for online public input and participation which many states have adopted. Under the proposed bill, the commission has wide latitude to determine when, where, how and whether to hold hearings. It is critical that the voices and perspectives of voters, from all geographic areas and communities of the state, be heard through the redistricting process through a robust plan, required by statute, for redistricting hearings.
- **Court Role:** The bill does not specifically state that if the commission fails to reach an agreement on maps, then the court has the responsibility to create the plan. There should be a date established, such as September 1 of the year ending in 1, that the court will have jurisdiction to create a redistricting maps to ensure a well-considered plan is created in a manner to meet deadlines established by existing statutes.

We thank the bill authors in both chambers for their leadership on this important issue to ensure people-powered fair maps here in Minnesota. While LWVMN cannot support HF 550 as written, we look forward to the opportunity to work with the author and other leaders to develop an approach to redistricting that works for all stakeholders, including the voters and communities of Minnesota.

Sincerely,



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