



**TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE EDUCATION, HEALTH & ENVIRONMENTAL
AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**SB 967 Legislative and Congressional Districts – Criteria and Open Hearing
Process (Fair Maps Act)**

POSITION: Support

BY: Lois Hybl and Richard Willson, Co-Presidents

DATE: March 5, 2020

The League of Women Voters supports a state redistricting process and standards that promote fair and effective representation of the entire population of state in the General Assembly and United States Congress and enables maximum opportunity for public scrutiny. We believe that a fair redistricting process produces districts which are substantially equal in population, compact, composed of contiguous territory, and give due regard to natural boundaries and political subdivisions. It is critical that election districts conform to standards that are both politically neutral and respectful of communities of voters, rather than subdividing neighborhoods and communities to form oddly-shaped districts.

This bill would apply these basic criteria of form to Congressional districts and would protect communities which have been historically discriminated against through gerrymandering. Specifically, this bill would reinforce the requirements of the Voting Rights Act, emphasizing the need for protections against dividing or packing communities of color. It also takes into account the recent attacks we have seen against the protections afforded by the Voting Rights Act and builds into the Maryland constitution further protections for communities that share racial, ethnic, economic, social, cultural, geographic, or historical identities.

Additionally, this bill calls for transparency in the process of redistricting, and robust opportunities for public engagement and scrutiny of the process by establishing and implementing an open hearing process. This bill would enact an essential piece of a comprehensive reform of Maryland's redistricting process and make for a healthier democracy.

Therefore, we urge a favorable report on SB 967.