

SB 967 Districts (Fair Maps Act)

Uploaded by: Bradford, Tierra

Position: FAV

**March 5, 2020**

Testimony on SB 967
Legislative and Congressional Districts – Criteria and Open Hearing Process (Fair Maps Act)
Education, Health, and Environmental affairs

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports SB 967, a constitutional amendment that would require redistricting standards for Maryland’s congressional districts. This legislation would reform our broken redistricting process.

Maryland draws new congressional and legislative districts every ten years, to update the maps for population changes. The Decennial census will be taking place this year and the next set of district lines will be redrawn in 2021. District maps are supposed to reflect the ideal of “one person, one vote.” But Maryland ranks worst in the nation when it comes to the compactness of its new Congressional districts. Four of our eight districts are among the most gerrymandered in the country. The current lines divide communities, especially minority communities, reducing those communities’ influence with their elected officials and causing voters to feel manipulated by the process.

Redistricting is more than just a partisan concern. When legislative and congressional districts cut through our counties, neighborhoods, and communities, the voice of those communities is fractured too. And the accountability between our elected officials and their constituents is equally fragmented. Voters feel the elections are rigged – that elected officials are choosing their voters, not the other way around.

When politicians gerrymander, it means communities of interest (an area with recognized similarities of interest that could be racial, ethnic, economic, social, cultural, geographic, or historic identities) are divided. Additionally, voters often have little choice in who to vote for because certain parts of the community that might vote against the interest of those drawing the lines are carved out of the district. The big concern is that when we allow partisan gerrymandering to stand, that can leave room open for other types of gerrymandering to occur as well, under the guise of partisan gerrymandering.

Voting Rights Act & Protecting Communities of Interest

SB 967 would reinforce Voting Rights Act protections, and protections for communities of interest for both legislative districts and congressional districts. It would require district lines be redrawn in compliance with the U.S. Constitution and the Federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA). 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. Under the SB 967, if a proposed redistricting map violates the VRA, the lines must be redrawn regardless of whether they are compact or contiguous. Although all redistricting maps already have to comply with the VRA, adding this language to the state constitution would ensure Maryland is continuing to protecting vulnerable communities.

Conclusion

It is critical that election districts conform to standards that are both politically neutral and respectful of communities of voters, rather than subdividing neighborhoods to form oddly-shaped districts. The standards proposed in SB 967 satisfy these criteria and would enact an essential piece of a comprehensive reform of Maryland's Congressional redistricting process.

Maryland is considered a leader on democracy reforms and should continue to lead by taking a meaningful step toward fixing our broken redistricting process. Passage of SB 967 would demonstrate to all Maryland citizens 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.



LWVMD_AshleyOleson_FAV_SB967

Uploaded by: Oleson, Ashley

Position: FAV



**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.

Mary Washington_FAV_SB973

Uploaded by: Senator Washington, Senator Washington

Position: FAV

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Judicial Proceedings Committee

Chair

Joint Committee on Ending
Homelessness

Chair

Joint Committee on Children,
Youth, and Families

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Dear Colleagues,

***SB973 – Joint Committee on Ending Homelessness –
Reports on Housing Status***

The need for this legislation was recognized during the Joint Committee on Ending Homelessness interim meetings.

SB973 would simply require four state agencies to report to the Joint Committee on Ending Homelessness on the housing status of individuals who have been discharged, released or served by those state agencies in the preceding 12 months.

The Health Services Cost Review Commission shall report:

- the number of patients discharged;
- the number of patients discharged who did not have a stable, permanent residence at the time of their discharge;
- the rate of readmission among:
 - patients with a stable permanent residence versus patients without a stable permanent residence; and
- the housing and social services provided to discharged patients.

The Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services shall report:

- the number of inmates released;
- the number of released inmates who did not have a stable, permanent residence at the time of release or parole;
- the number of released inmates who re-entered correctional facilities within a year of release or parole; and
- the settings to which inmates without a stable, permanent residence were released.

The Department of Labor and the Department of Human Services shall report:

- the number of individuals who did not have a stable, permanent residence while participating in workforce development programs; and
- the housing and social services provided to those individuals while participating in workforce development programs.

In partnership,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Mary L. Washington'.

Senator Mary Washington, District 43

MaryWashington_FAV_SB967

Uploaded by: Senator Washington, Senator Washington

Position: FAV

MARY L. WASHINGTON, PH.D
Legislative District 43
Baltimore City

Education, Health, and
Environmental Affairs Committee

Chair

Joint Committee on Ending
Homelessness

Chair

Joint Committee on Children,
Youth, and Families



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

Dear Colleagues:

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 is a landmark piece of federal legislation in the United States that prohibits racial discrimination in voting. YET Fifty-five years later, we are still fighting to secure that right **BECAUSE** Maryland's voting maps boast some of the most egregious gerrymandered districts in the nation. It's time for a change.

SB 967, offers a constitutional amendment that would amend the standards to which legislative districts are required to conform in the state. Following each decennial census, the boundaries of state and congressional legislative districts are redrawn to adjust for population changes.

Currently, the Maryland Constitution requires state legislative districts to consist of adjoining territory, be compact in form, and be of substantially equal population, and due regard must be given to natural boundaries and the boundaries of political subdivisions. Congressional district boundaries, on the other hand, do not currently have redistricting standards beyond the federal requirements of equal population and adherence to the Voting Rights Act. **SB 967**, if ratified by a majority of Maryland voters in the next general election, would apply the current state redistricting standards to congressional districts.

Furthermore, it would require any redrawing of the districts to provide racial, ethnic, and language groups with an equal opportunity to participate in the political process, and ensure the integrity of areas with recognized similarities of interests - including racial, ethnic, economic, social, cultural, geographic, or historical identities - are respected in any boundary changes. It's critical that we have clear redistricting standards in place for both state and congressional legislative districts, and that the redrawing of boundaries following by the 2020 Census is transparent and fair. The Fair Maps Act is one step we can take to ensure equal representation, and uphold the principle for which our forefathers fought.

For these reasons, I urge the committee to give a favorable report for **SB 967**.

In partnership,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mary Washington". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mary" and the last name "Washington" clearly distinguishable.

Senator Mary Washington, District 43