

March 2, 2020

**Testimony on HB 346
Redistricting Reform Act of 2020
Rules and Executive Nominations**

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports HB 346, which would establish a commission independent from state government that would be responsible for drawing legislative and congressional districts. This legislation would be a major reform for our broken redistricting process. It is a bold proposal based on best practices from states across the nation. Most importantly, it would take politics out of the redistricting process.

Maryland draws new congressional and legislative districts every ten years, to update the maps for population changes. District maps are supposed to reflect the ideal of “one person, one vote.” But Maryland ranks as one of the 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, reducing those communities’ influence with their elected officials and causing voters to feel manipulated by the process.

This is not simply an ideological problem; it is a real problem with real impacts. Maryland has one of the worst partisan gerrymanders in the country that was subject in the Supreme Court redistricting case *Lamone v. Benisek* summer of 2019. Additionally, in 2017, former Governor O’Malley admitted that he intended to partisan gerrymander when he oversaw the redistricting process in 2011. Now is the time to address this major stain on the legacy of Maryland’s Democracy.

The independent commission should be politically diverse, including three from the majority party, three from the minority party, and three members from neither political party. The applicants will go through a screening process and final members will be drawn through a lottery. Elected officials, candidates, lobbyists, and political staff are prohibited from serving. The commission will draw lines without regard to party affiliation or incumbent residency. The commission will hold “ample” public hearings on the proposed plan. The legislature may reject the map through a supermajority vote.

State legislative districts shall be far more consistent in size and there should be consistency between single-member or three-member delegate districts.

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. We understand a desire to wait until more states across the country have modernized their redistricting processes. But Marylanders deserve fair representation now.

One newly added detail that we would suggest amending out is the prohibition of having the Attorney General fulfill their duties as the primary counsel for the actions of the Maryland state government on issues related to redistricting maps. The Attorney General is the highest-ranking lawyer in the states’ employ, and likely one of the most experienced – to cut them out of the process of defending state action is ill-advised.

Redistricting maps need to give fair representation to all, to protect communities, and to create districts that a legislator can understand and speak for. HB 346 would end our politically opportunistic redistricting process for our Congressional and legislative maps and we urge a favorable report.

