



**TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE RULES AND EXECUTIVE NOMINATIONS
COMMITTEE**

HB 346 Redistricting Reform Act of 2020

POSITION: Support

BY: Lois Hybl and Richard Willson, Co-Presidents

DATE: March 2, 2020

We support a state redistricting process and standards that promote fair and effective representation in the state legislature and United States Congress with maximum opportunity for public scrutiny. To ensure a process that is fair and far removed from political bias, we support employing an independent citizens' commission as the redistricting body. The membership of this commission should be multi-partisan, including unaffiliated voters, geographically representative, not include any current state elected official, and represent the diversity of the state of Maryland.

The recommendations outlined in this bill provide for a multi-partisan citizens' commission to draw Maryland's electoral maps. The process for selection of the commission members has been designed to avoid promotion of political interests by partisan actors, incorporating the recommendations of the Maryland Redistricting Reform Study Commission of 2015, and legislator recommendations from committee hearings 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019. The screening panel to select these commission members will be the State Ethics Commission which will guarantee impartiality in the selection process. Pooling and random selection of qualified applicants will further bolster the independence of the body drawing district lines from political influence. (See attached infographic for a clearer view of the proposed process.)

Importantly, this bill requires the activities of the commission to be subject to the rules which govern open meetings and access to public information. We believe that democratic government depends upon informed and active citizen participation and requires that governmental bodies protect citizens' right to know by giving adequate notice of proposed actions, holding open meetings and making public records accessible. The presence of this transparency requirement increases our confidence in this proposed process.

We would like to see Maryland lead in the movement for reform that is already sweeping the nation by enacting this bill and taking a meaningful step toward fixing our broken redistricting process. Passage of this bill would demonstrate to all Maryland citizens that their representatives respect their right to have an equal voice in our democratic process, and they are proactive about protecting that right.

We urge a favorable report on HB 346.