



Maryland

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

SB 204 Potomac Compact for Fair Representation

POSITION: Support with Amendments

DATE: February 6, 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 prefer 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.

We commend this bill for its promotion of standards for Congressional district lines, public hearings, and a commission of professionals dedicated to nonpartisan research and analysis. We appreciate the effort of this bill to ensure that the commission members will be experts in fields that will bolster their abilities to analyze and produce fair maps.

SB 204 takes effect only if the Commonwealth of Virginia adopts a substantially similar process by January 1, 2021. If the Commonwealth of Virginia does not do so by January 1, 2021, the bill does not take effect. We would prefer that Maryland be a leader in redistricting reform and enact a process free from consideration of what other states are doing. However, if we are working toward a compact in reform, this bill should take into account the progress made already in Virginia to pass a constitutional amendment to improve redistricting standards and create a commission that gives citizens a seat at the table. We have attached an infographic which explains the commission process and makeup passed by the 2019 Virginia legislature and which is close to passage for a second time before the 2020 Virginia legislature.

We would urge an amendment to this bill that would also enable the commission process and structure outlined for Maryland to be enacted if Virginia enacts the reform it is currently on track to pass for a second time.

We urge a favorable report with amendments on SB 204.

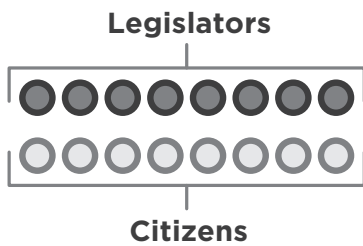
VIRGINIA'S REDISTRICTING COMMISSION PROPOSAL

In 2019, the Virginia General Assembly overwhelmingly passed a bipartisan constitutional amendment proposal that could create Virginia's first redistricting commission. If it's passed again in 2020, this will be the most comprehensive redistricting reform to ever pass a state legislature.

This was the first crucial step toward truly reforming the way Virginia draws its legislative districts by including citizens in the redistricting process and correcting the hyper-partisan status quo process.

And although this bipartisan plan does not reflect every provision we urged in our original proposal, make no mistake: **This will end partisan gerrymandering in Virginia.**

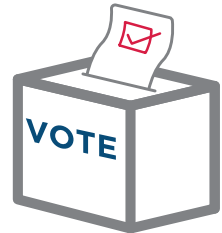
HOW THE COMMISSION WILL LOOK



Districts will be drawn by a commission comprised of 8 citizens and 8 legislators, with one of the citizens serving as chair.



The citizen selection process will be politically balanced and the final determination of who serves will be made by a panel of five retired circuit court judges. This process is similar to selecting an impartial jury.



Prohibits citizen members from being an elected member of Congress or the Virginia General Assembly or a member of their staffs.

CHECKS AND BALANCES



The amendment was created by a legislative conference committee, which combined provisions from several pieces of redistricting legislation being considered in 2019 - including the checks and balances outlined in the bipartisan proposal drafted with the help of OneVirginia2021's Citizens Constitutional Amendment Committee.



The make-up of the commission protects us from partisan gerrymandering by requiring a supermajority of citizens and legislators for approval of district maps.



The General Assembly must approve or reject the commission's map, but they are prohibited from amending it. Additionally, the Governor is excluded from the approval process, because it would throw off the partisan balance created by the existing framework

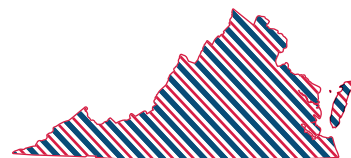
THE BENEFITS



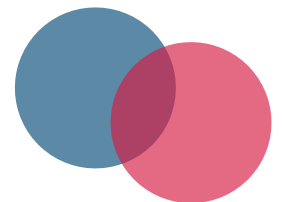
This measure would amend Virginia's Constitution, thereby enshrining reform for generations to come.



This would be the first time in Virginia's history that citizens would have a voice in the redistricting process.



Virginia would effectively eliminate gerrymandering dominated by one party, moving ahead of states like Maryland and North Carolina.



All meetings, minutes and data will be completely open to the public. This will serve as an important check on the commission's work and allow us all to be watchdogs on our government.

For more detailed insights on this plan, check out ONEVIRGINIA2021.ORG/AMENDMENT