



Testimony to the House Environmental and Transportation Committee

HB 81 - Constitutional Amendment – Form of County Government – Requirement to Adopt Charter Home Rule

Position: Information Only

By: Linda Kohn - President

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The League of Women Voters develops our positions via a study and consensus process. This means that a committee studies the issue, develops a fact sheet based on research of Maryland history, current practices around the nation, and best practices as defined by various government think tanks. The fact sheet is reviewed by our members around the state and they come to consensus on what we should support or oppose.

The question of home rule for Maryland Counties was studied in 1957, 1983 and 1985. The consensus was “A mandatory County home rule with a preference for a charter.” Montgomery County was the first to become a Charter government which they did in 1948. After adopting our position on Charter government, many county Leagues including: Anne Arundel (1964), Baltimore (1956), Dorchester (2002), Frederick (2014), Harford (1972), Howard (1968), Montgomery (1948), Prince George's (1970), Talbot (1973), and Wicomico (1964) used our position to advocate for home rule counties governed by a county charter.

Delegates at the 1983 LWVMD Convention felt that home rule should be determined locally and not be imposed by the state and therefore voted to change our position to endorse charter home rule without the use of “mandatory”. At the 1985 Convention the issue was again debated and the delegates voted to amend the position to its present form, “County home rule, with preference for charter.”

We do appreciate one of the goals of this bill which is to mandate that any charter adopted by a county require election of members of the county council by the voters of councilmanic districts that have been established. In 2021, the League supported [HB 655](#) Local Government – County Commissioner Elections – District Voting. The League of Women Voters supports standards that not only protect the right of all citizens to vote, but also encourage all citizens to vote. To that end, we support standards that promote fair and effective representation at all levels of government with maximum opportunity for public participation. We are all aware of the growing apathy or civil unrest of voters because they believe that the system is rigged, and that their vote will not matter. We believe that requiring that the voters in a particular district be represented by a District Commissioner elected by a plurality of the voters in that district would help to restore the faith of voters in elected officials.

While we cannot support this legislation as drafted, we do support one of the features of HB 81.