

Comments on Redistricting

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To: Rick Kloos <Rick.Kloos@senate.ks.gov>;

Cc: Redistricting <Redistricting@KLRD.ks.gov>;

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Sept. 19, 2021

Senator Rick Kloos
Topeka, KS

Senator Kloos:

The League of Women Voters of Topeka Shawnee County thanks the redistricting committees for conducting the statewide Listening Tour during the week of August 9-13. We hope you will help the committees build on their stated commitment to a transparent process, and the interest generated in the redistricting process, by giving members of the public more opportunities to comment on new district maps. Opportunities for Shawnee County residents to weigh in on new districts is especially important since, as you know, there was no hearing in Topeka. Both your development of maps, and Kansans' consideration of those maps, will be expedited if the committees promptly adopt guidelines and technical rules for this round of redistricting. Delaying adoption of those two key elements raises the risk that the committees will fail to achieve their leaders' stated goal of conducting redistricting in a transparent manner. We encourage three actions now to make the new districts fair for all Kansans.

- 1. Adopt guidelines and criteria for new districts no later than October 1.** We urge you to adopt 2022 guidelines that do not include "incumbent protection" and that the redistricting database not include members' "home seat" information. While you may feel that type of guideline is useful to the process of adopting new maps by making it easier to get the necessary votes on the Committee and on the House and Senate floors, it likely will limit the application of other, more objective, criteria for districts and preservation of communities of interest. Also, please advocate for ending the practice of including voter registration and/or vote results in the redistricting database. While not a guideline or criterion, the presence of such data makes it all too easy for partisan considerations to override all others in the creation of our districts.
- 2. Adopt technical committee rules by October 1.** The technical rules should allow individuals to easily submit community of interest maps that are useful and meaningful by

being included in the redistricting database as overlays. The goal here is giving your fellow committee members easy visual access to community of interest maps while you create new districts. There are areas within Topeka such as the historic Oakland, North Topeka, East Topeka, and Highland Park neighborhoods and others that are smaller, but nonetheless cohesive, that mapmakers should be aware of as they create districts. The existence of free, easy-to-use online mapping tools raises the expectations of your constituents that they can participate in a meaningful way in redistricting. Recognizing that reality in your technical rules will open new lines of communication that will benefit all Kansans.

- 3. Make community input easy and accessible.** The League is heartened that the committees will continue to accept input from the public after the completion of the initial round of hearings and I note that nearly a dozen pieces of testimony have been posted by KLRD since the hearings ended. We urge the committees to ensure that new information is provided directly to legislators and made available to the public. In addition, the League requests a more streamlined and widely publicized process for submission of maps and related material. Such improvements will contribute to transparency and public participation in creating fair districts for Kansans.

In your role as members of the committee, you can represent us best if we all know the framework for the process sooner rather than later. This interim gives you a great opportunity to obtain much-needed community input to inform decisions you will make on district maps during the 2022 Session. The League stands ready to assist with that effort. We appreciate your attention to our requests and thank you for your service.

Sincerely,

Carole Jordan

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