

Comments on Redistricting

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To: Kristen O'Shea <Kristen.OShea@senate.ks.gov>;

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

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Sept. 19. 2021

Senator O'Shea:

The League of Women Voters of Topeka Shawnee County is following up with you after the Redistricting Listening Tour of August 9-13. We were thankful that the committees conducted those preliminary hearings. We are asking you to communicate with your colleagues on the committees to encourage them to build on and implement their stated commitment to a transparent redistricting process. Opportunities for Shawnee County residents to weigh in on new districts is especially important since, as you know, there wasn't a hearing in Topeka. Both the 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 at this point 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 ask the committees to adopt 2022 guidelines that do not include "incumbent protection" and to ensure that the redistricting database does not include members' "home seat" information. While as incumbents you may feel an incumbent protection guideline is useful and that it eases the way to getting the necessary votes in the Committees and on the House and Senate floors, it may stand in the way of the application of other more objective criteria for districts and preservation of communities of interest. Also, please advocate an end to the practice of including voter registration and/or vote results and 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, also by October 1.** The committees' technical rules should allow for individuals to easily submit community of interest maps that are useful and meaningful and can be easily included in the redistricting database as overlays. Our goal with this request is providing any legislators who may work on maps with easy visual

access to community of interest maps while they 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 the committee's technical rules will open lines of communication that will benefit all Kansans.

- 3. Make community input easy and accessible.** The League is heartened that the Committees have announced that they 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 ask you to urge the Committees to ensure that new information is provided directly to legislators – even those not on the committees -- and made available to the public. In addition, we request a more streamlined and widely publicized process for submission of proposed district maps and related material. Such improvements will contribute to transparency and public participation in creating fair districts for all Kansans.

You can represent us best if we all know the framework for redistricting sooner rather than later. This interim provides a great opportunity for you 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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