

I submit the following written testimony to the public record in support of HF 1605 contained in the House Omnibus Elections Bill, a bill to establish a redistricting commission and redistricting principles, with Chief Author, Representative Ginny Klevorn.

Democracy is built on a few principles, mainly that every voice should be heard, every vote should be counted, and every vote should be equal. In our most recent election we saw a LOT of different tactics for voter suppression across the country, from intimidation, to “no power cords,” to closing polling places in poor neighborhoods, to directly disenfranchising Native Americans in North Dakota. This is NOT the America I was taught about in school and NOT the America my parents raised me to believe in. This is NOT the America my father and nephews went to war to protect.

Here in Minnesota we are lucky not to have such blatant forms of voter suppression. However, there is a major form of voter suppression at play that is more insidious and fundamental - Gerrymandering. Gerrymandering has been around for a very long time, and has been used by both parties to try to increase their power. It's time for us to put a stop to it. Gerrymandering contradicts our principles, allowing incumbents to pick their voters, rather than voters picking their representatives. It dilutes and perverts the will of the people. While door knocking before the midterms, the complaint I heard over and over was that the legislators did not need to listen to their constituents... that individual votes didn't matter. HF 1605 will help change that and restore trust.

The Minnesota Constitution specifies that redistricting maps be drawn by the legislature. However, this puts legislators in the awkward position of having the power to help themselves or hurt their opponents at the cost of their integrity and loss of trust among the voters. Redistricting reform has broad support among Minnesotans of all parties and many nonpartisan groups. The Minnesota Chamber of Commerce includes redistricting by an advisory committee among its top 2019 legislative priorities. HF 1605 establishes a redistricting commission to prepare maps that would be drawn fresh, from the ground up, based on communities and voters rather than on maps that were previously gerrymandered by one party or the other.

A very powerful and insightful aspect of HF 1605 is the redistricting principles. The most important of these in my mind is that no plan can be drawn to purposefully favor or disfavor a political party or candidate, and that residences of incumbents will not be taken into consideration at any point of the process. If the residence of an incumbent is used, or if the prior district shape is just re-used no matter what changes may have occurred, then by definition the so-called “newly” drawn districts will favor the status-quo and give preference to the incumbent, rather than reflecting the current community and making districts competitive! Incumbents should have no advantage over their challengers other than the record of work that they have done for the people who elected them. Let the best candidate win. This is of course exactly opposite of another redistricting bill supported by Rep. Schultz HF 1855 protects incumbents in ways that go against the very idea of redistricting reform!

Finally, not only is gerrymandering un-American, it is COSTLY. There were SEVEN lawsuits related to the 2010 census, not counting appeals! This, combined with the amount of time wasted by the legislature submitting plans that were then vetoed, likely amounts to millions of tax dollars spent that could have been used to help Minnesota in other ways. Please stop this inefficient and wasteful process!

I urge you to support HF 1605. Thank you very much for your time and consideration of my testimony.

Respectfully,

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