



Writing a Letter to the Editor

You can support the Fair Districts New Jersey campaign and bring attention to the importance of fair redistricting reforms by writing a Letter to the Editor!

Writing a letter to your local newspaper is an effective way to raise awareness about an issue and encourage members of your community to take action. When writing your letter:

- Make sure to read and follow the publication's submission guidelines, including the word-limit.
- Stay focused: write only about one issue.
- Catch the readers' attention with a strong opening statement.
- Share a brief statement about why you care about this issue: make it personal.
- Share why you think others should care about this issue.
- Use clear, simple language and keep sentences short.
- End with a "call to action." Examples include:
 - Call your legislators and urge them to support fair redistricting reforms.
 - Join me in signing a petition supporting the "fair districts" principles.
 - Visit www.fairdistrictsnj.org to find out all the ways you can take action to end gerrymandering in our state.
- If your letter gets published, share it with us by sending an email to hkioukis@lwnj.org.

Why is Redistricting a timely issue?

- The 2020 Census is approaching! Redistricting occurs only once a decade after the Census, so the time is now to pass redistricting reforms.
- The U.S. Supreme Court recently ruled that partisan gerrymandering cases cannot be challenged in the federal courts. It's up to each state to pass reforms that prevent gerrymandering

Additional "Fair Districts" Talking Points:

- Voters should be choosing their elected officials, not the other way around.
- New Jersey residents deserve a fair redistricting process and fair maps.
- Our legislative district lines should not be manipulated by party politics.
- Our legislative district lines should be drawn in a way that is transparent and community-driven.
- Gerrymandering is a form of voter suppression.
- Gerrymandering is one reason so many people are disillusioned by politics.
- Gerrymandering undermines our democracy.
- The outcomes of our elections should not be determined before voters even cast their ballots.
- When legislators feel secure in gerrymandered districts, they are less likely to listen to voters and are harder to hold accountable.
- States across the country are passing meaningful redistricting reforms to protect their residents from partisan gerrymandering. New Jersey should do the same!



Sample Letters

SAMPLE 1 – FOR INDIVIDUALS

(DATE)

Every 10 years after the Census, states must redraw their voting districts to account for population changes. But in too many states, this process is manipulated by politicians and party insiders for political gain. In New Jersey, our redistricting process takes place behind closed doors as two partisan teams – one Republican and one Democratic – work to figure out a way to create a new district map that best advances their party’s interests. These groups are not required to hold public hearings, and the public does not have access to their records or to any drafts of maps.

If party insiders continue to create our new district maps in secret, how can we ever trust that our votes will matter? We need a better process in place. If you agree that voters should choose their politicians and not the other way around, visit Fair Districts New Jersey’s campaign website to learn more about taking action to improve redistricting NJ: www.fairdistrictsnj.org. Then, contact your legislators and urge them to support fair redistricting reforms that improve transparency and prevent gerrymandering. We don’t have a lot of time before the next round of map drawing begins. Take action today to support fair maps and strengthen our democracy.

(CONTACT INFORMATION)

SAMPLE 2 – FOR ORGANIZATIONS

(DATE)

Stories of “gerrymandering” are all over the news as unfair and discriminatory maps get taken to court in states around the country. Too often, politicians from both major parties manipulate the district map-drawing process to shut voters out of the process and create “safe” seats for themselves for an entire decade. As an organization that (MISSION STATEMENT), (NAME OF ORGANIZATION) join(s) with other groups around the country to call for an end to gerrymandering.

The only way to ensure free and fair elections is to implement a new redistricting process that engages the public, keeps communities together and prevents politicians and party operatives from acting in their own self interests. That is why we support the Fair Districts New Jersey campaign, an initiative to make redistricting more transparent, independent and community-focused. Through Fair Districts, we can work to improve New Jersey’s flawed redistricting process in which two teams – one Democratic and one Republican – work behind closed doors to create our state’s new map. Visit www.fairdistrictsnj.org to learn more, and join us to fight for fair maps in New Jersey.

(CONTACT INFORMATION)



Sample League Member Letters

I can't be the only one who's heartened by the spike in New Jerseyans' civic engagement since November 2016. A healthy democracy needs participation. I've been volunteering my time to fight for integrity in our voting process, which underlies the success of all activism. A fair voting process allows Americans to have our voices represented *every single day*. Sadly, we have a disease that is corrosive to our democracy: unfair voting districts.

When our legislative and congressional voting district lines are drawn in a way that is transparent, accountable, and impartial, we ALL get the fair representation promised in our Constitution - "one person, one vote."

Unfortunately, today lines are drawn by partisan insiders and elected officials who seek personal benefit or party dominance. The public doesn't have a meaningful opportunity to comment on proposed maps. Politicians don't have to be accountable to constituents. People's voices aren't heard and they stop voting. Dysfunction in government flourishes. You've heard it before: "Politicians choose their voters; voters don't choose their politicians." We can do better!

I volunteer my time to Fair Districts New Jersey (<http://fairdistrictsnj.org/>), a non-partisan coalition dedicated to redistricting reform by demanding more public input into the process and bringing an *independent citizens commission* to NJ. Learn about the issue, sign our online petition, and call or write your state legislators and demand they support an independent citizen commission and more transparency. Other states have found success with these measures. Let's get our democracy back to health with fair districts.

Supriya Desai, Edgewater, NJ

After the 2020 Census, the lines of our 40 NJ Legislative Districts must be redrawn. We need fairly-drawn districts for fair elections.

Currently, these boundaries are oddly created: Ten individuals appointed by Democratic and Republican Party leaders, typically sitting legislators, break into 2 "teams" and work behind closed doors to create new maps. The problem is that each team works to "gerrymander" the districts to favor their own party. This is why some district boundary lines are suspiciously irregular. Then, an independent arbiter chooses which team's map becomes our new district map. Throughout this process, the voice of the public is missing.

The League of Women Voters of NJ has researched redistricting in other states and believes we can do better. They recommend a new process that is transparent, inclusive and independent. New district maps should put the interests of communities – not incumbents - first. "Fair" districts would be more competitive, motivating legislators to be more responsive and giving everyone across the state an equal voice.

Visit fairdistrictsnj.org to sign a petition and learn about ending political gerrymandering in NJ. Tell your friends, too! Also, urge your State Senator and Assemblypersons to take action to improve redistricting in 2020.

Ellen Kovac, Union Area League of Women Voters