

**Testimony in Opposition of SCR43**  
**Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee**  
**November 26, 2018**

The League of Women Voters of New Jersey is a nonpartisan political organization that works to protect our democratic processes and empower voters across the state. We are strongly opposed to SCR43, a proposal to amend the New Jersey State Constitution that would codify the partisan gerrymandering of our 40 legislative districts and pre-determine election outcomes for decades to come.

As an organization that advocates for transparency, fairness and public participation in the redistricting process, we believe the manipulation of district lines to favor one political party over another has no place in a state's supreme law. Legislative districts are re-drawn every ten years after the Census to reflect New Jersey's demographic shifts, not to reflect past voter preferences or speculate on future electoral outcomes. Requiring redistricting commissioners to consider partisan data, past election results and complicated calculations when drawing new maps is nothing more than an attempt by one party to more effectively distribute its votes across the state in order to solidify their power.

This is undemocratic. Voters should be picking their politicians, not the other way around.

New Jersey's current legislative redistricting process *could* benefit from meaningful reforms that encourage civic engagement, increase voter turnout, produce a legislature more reflective of the racial and ethnic diversity of the state, and improve representatives' responsiveness to their constituents. But SCR43 would do none of that. The new language SCR43 does propose that aims to increase transparency, improve public engagement and gather more public input is undermined, if not outright negated, by additional redistricting criteria that calculates "party favorability" and "district competitiveness."

The purpose of gathering input from the public should be to understand the various communities of interest across the state and to hear directly from these groups—whether a group of farmers, an ethnic enclave, a shore community or workers who rely on a particular NJ Transit line—what *they* think their district should look like, and how *they* want to be represented. Instead, in SCR43, communities of interest and their protection become afterthoughts, and are only considered as a tie-breaking mechanism between plans that prioritize partisanship data over the will of the people. This is not how we achieve "fair" new maps.

Using partisanship data in redrawing district lines to achieve "fairness" at best oversimplifies a complex process and assumes the only thing that matters to voters is party affiliation. At worst, it results in gerrymandered boundary lines that favor one political party over another, dilute the voting power of communities of color, harm communities of interest and potentially violate the Constitution and Voting Rights Act. These same concerns existed when the Legislature attempted to fast-track this proposal at the very end of the 2015-2016 legislative session, and they exist now.



Voters across the country have approved ballot measures that improve their legislative redistricting processes by prioritizing public input, changing who draws the new boundary lines, and introducing ranked-order line-drawing criteria to ensure final maps are fair, responsive and reflective of their states' populations. When all other states are moving forward and improving this fundamental component of our democracy to protect their district maps from partisan gerrymandering, New Jersey is moving in the opposite direction.

SCR43 would not give New Jerseyans the meaningful redistricting reforms that are needed to produce "fair" maps. In fact, SCR43 would make our legislative redistricting process worse. We are disappointed to see such a hyperpartisan proposal resurface during a period in our history when defending democracy and empowering voters has never been more important. On behalf of the League of Women Voters of New Jersey, I urge you to vote "No" on SCR43 and not move this proposal out of Committee.

Thank you.

Testimony submitted by

Helen Kioukis

League of Women Voters of New Jersey