

LWVMC Testimony to Montgomery County Council re draft map proposed by the Redistricting Commission – November 16, 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before the council. My name is Jacqueline Coolidge. I have been a resident of Montgomery County for over 25 years, and I reside in the current District 1.

I am here to testify in favor of Expedited Bill 41-21 on behalf of the Montgomery County League of Women Voters.

The League has a long history of working to ensure that the redistricting process is accessible and transparent and that the resulting map is fair and equitable. We are pleased to report that the Montgomery County redistricting process and final product meets these goals.

First, we would like to commend the council for appointing an independent commission to draft the proposed map, an approach the League has promoted for years. We have been favorably impressed by the work of the Redistricting Commission.

- The meetings were easily accessible, and commission members were very proactive in offering to make presentations and solicit input from many organizations in the county, including the League of Women Voters and members of the public at large.
- The commission established a set of ground rules that reflected the values of the county, and it followed those ground rules throughout its process.

Second, we believe the commission's proposed map achieves many worthwhile goals.

- In particular, it creates a plurality African-American district and a plurality Hispanic district. This should help these communities elect representatives of their choice.
- In addition, the map creates two new up-county districts, increasing representation from an area that has felt under-represented on the council.
- Finally, the map respects the desires of the cities of Gaithersburg and Rockville to be included in one district.

In particular, we believe this map does a good job of protecting vulnerable “communities of interest” in the county. We have compared the draft map with the Center for Disease Control's map of “social vulnerability” (<https://svi.cdc.gov/map.html>), which shows a distinct swath running from about Germantown southeast through the center of the county along the main transit corridor and then east to the border.

While much of the rest of the county is relatively well-off, households in that swath have often been left behind. We witnessed this most recently when there were delays getting these households vaccinated, which resulted in high rates of COVID-19 cases among the residents, many of whom are our frontline workers.

The two alternative maps proposed to the commission are also good maps, but we believe the majority-approved map has the edge in prioritizing the interests of the most vulnerable communities of interest within the county.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the challenges that the Commission successfully overcame in drafting this map.

- It had to meet a number of legal requirements such as equal population and contiguity.
- It also respected existing municipal boundaries and communities of interest, and it considered the racial and ethnic composition of communities to avoid packing or splitting up these populations. These parameters were often in tension with each other and made it challenging to draft the final map.

In addition, we would like to commend the commission for deciding NOT to consider things such as the residence of current incumbents or other elements that could be considered “incumbent protection,” another important feature the County Council should respect in its vote on a final map.

Of course, no map can be considered “perfect”; some members of the public will inevitably be disappointed and come forward with requests for changes. While we can imagine that the council may want to make minor adjustments to the proposed map, we urge it not to indulge in substantial changes without further public hearings.

Looking ahead to the 2030 census, we would suggest that the next redistricting commission make use of open-source, user-friendly mapping software so that the public can be more actively engaged in the process. We also hope that the census data will not be delayed as it was for this cycle.

Thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the Montgomery County League of Women Voters to the County Council on this important issue.