



**THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN
VOTERS** OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

4 WEST 43rd STREET, SUITE 615, NEW YORK, NY 10036
PHONE: (212) 725-3541 • FAX: (212) 725-3443
WWW.LWVNYC.ORG • OFFICE@LWVNYC.ORG

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE NEW YORK STATE SENATE MAJORITY
CONFERENCE SENATE LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE ON DEMOGRAPHIC
RESEARCH AND REAPPORTIONMENT**

DECEMBER 14, 2010
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

My name is Evelyn Katz and I am speaking today on behalf of the League of Women Voters of New York City. Thank you for having this hearing on the 2011-2012 redistricting process and for allowing us to speak. We believe that this round of redistricting is an opportunity to fundamentally change elections in New York State by removing the process from partisan influences. My comments today will emphasize our belief that the drawing of district lines for legislative and Congressional districts should be done by an independent commission, not by legislators. Barbara Bartoletti, Legislative Director of the League of Women Voters of New York State, will speak at the hearing in Albany and she will address appropriate guidelines and criteria for redistricting as well as this central point.

The current process allows elected officials to choose their voters before the voters have a chance to choose them. It is in the self-interest of legislators and legislative leaders to preserve both the careers of individual legislators and the dominance of their political party. The resulting partisan gerrymandering has significantly reduced the rights of New Yorkers to be fairly represented and resulted in one of the highest rates of incumbents being re-elected in the country. We believe that an independent commission to draw the lines for legislative and Congressional districts can operate under existing state constitutional requirements. The members of the commission should be fairly chosen, nonpartisan, and reflect the diversity of the state. The lines should be drawn in a manner that does not favor any incumbent or political party, and under guidelines that provide for fair and effective representation of racial and language minorities. The process should be transparent and open to public input.

Finally, there should be an effective mechanism for legislative approval of the commission's plans. We believe that Senator Valesky's bill S.1614B accomplishes all these things and strongly support its passage as soon as possible in order to draw the lines for the next decade.

In addition, I want to emphasize again our belief that the process should be transparent in all respects both through multiple public hearings throughout the state and the use of technology to have citizens participate at all stages of the process. All data on which the commission relies should be available to the public, including maps, criteria, software and proposed plans. In all of its 90 plus years of history, the League has stood for fair and equitable representation for the people of our state. We believe that the overriding concern in drawing new districts is to ensure that all New York residents are ensured of

fair representation in Congress and the Legislature. To do otherwise discourages participation in the political process and increases voter cynicism. We hope that this series of public hearings is in fact the beginning of a fair, transparent and objective redistricting process.

Thank you.