



September 13, 2019

VIA Email to Author and the Office of the Governor

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor of California
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: SB 139 (Allen) - Independent redistricting commissions – REQUEST FOR SIGNATURE

Dear Governor Newsom:

The League of Women Voters of California is pleased to cosponsor SB 139 (Allen), legislation that will require counties with more than 400,000 residents to establish an independent redistricting commission, ensuring a more fair, nonpartisan system for drawing the lines of county supervisorial districts. We write to request your signature on this important bill.

The League has been a longtime proponent of redistricting reform both in California and across the country. As leaders of the movement that led to our state's Citizens Redistricting Commission, we spent years championing reforms that provide a clear national standard of excellence. Furthermore, local Leagues throughout California work assiduously to encourage public input on local redistricting.

While California is at the vanguard, having established independent, nonpartisan redistricting for congressional, state legislative, and Board of Equalization districts, gerrymandering has continued at the local level. Current law permits, but does not require, counties, cities, school, community college and special districts to establish independent, hybrid or advisory redistricting commissions. Where 40% of our population but only 10% of our county supervisors are Latino, and where single-party rule continues to exist in politically diverse jurisdictions, it is clear that we need to do more to ensure representative local government. The local line-drawing process has been used by incumbents in a cynical fashion to disenfranchise growing ethnic and language minority communities, reduce the voting power of political minorities, and even draw political opponents out of the district. It's time to require a transparent, non-partisan process in which independent commissions draw the lines for large-county supervisorial districts.

SB 139, modeled off California's successful state redistricting commission, provides that transparent, non-partisan process. It requires:

- Independent Commissions for large-county supervisory districts. Counties with populations of more than 400,000 residents would establish either 9 or 12-member independent citizens redistricting commissions that have the full power to draft and adopt district maps, independent of the board of supervisors.
- Screening panel and standards to ensure commissioner independence. A selection process, similar to the state's process, will ensure commissioner diversity and impartiality. Like the State Commission, any eligible resident in the county may apply to serve on the commission. Applicants who are likely to be politically biased are ineligible, including staff or family

members of incumbents, recent candidates for local office, political party officials, and major campaign contributors. Eligible applicants will be reviewed by a screening panel (each county's civil grand jury) to create a subpool of the most qualified and diverse applicants. Then, like the State process, about half the commissioners are appointed by random draw; those appointees then select the final commissioners.

- Proportionality. Counties may choose whether to establish a party-balanced commission (like the State) or a party-proportional commission (like Los Angeles and San Diego Counties), which is the default. In party-proportional commissions, the political party preferences of the commission members would be as proportional as possible to the total number of voters who are registered with each political party (including no party preference voters), except that a majority of commissioners may not be registered with the same political party. Under a balanced commission, the 9-member commission will have 3 Democrats, 3 Republicans, and 3 Others.
- Robust opportunities for public participation. To ensure broad and diverse public input in the process, the bill requires at least five public hearings – including one in each supervisorial district -- and the publication of draft maps seven days prior to adoption.
- Transparency in line-drawing. Compliance with state open meeting and public records laws would be mandatory.
- No partisan gerrymandering. Partisan gerrymandering is illegal in state and congressional redistricting. This proposal extends that prohibition to county redistricting.

The League of Women Voters of California respectfully urges you to sign SB 139, legislation that will affirm the state's commitment to a fair, representative, and inclusive democracy in California counties.

Sincerely,



Carol Moon Goldberg
President