



## Committee on State Government Finance and Policy and Elections

February 23, 2017

SF 86

### League of Women Voters Minnesota

Good afternoon, Members. My name is Kathy Tomsich and I am a member and volunteer with the League of Women Voters Minnesota. Along with protecting the right to vote for all citizens, we believe in an open governmental system that is representative, accountable, and responsive. Most importantly, the League does not support or oppose any candidate or political party.

First of all, the League of Women Voters Minnesota believes it is good policy to define redistricting principles and procedures into statutes. The League supports the inclusion of the redistricting principles listed in SF 86, but we believe there should be additional principle that says the districts must not be drawn for the purpose of protecting or defeating an incumbent.

However, we oppose creating a new statutory provision prohibiting the legislature from creating an independent commission composed of non-legislators.

As you know, the legislature is not subject to open meeting laws and information laws thus this provision could result in the redistricting process being done with limited public knowledge or input. There are no provisions in SF 86 to make the redistricting process transparent.

The history of redistricting in Minnesota tells us there is a need for reform. In Minnesota, four of the last five redistricting plans were determined by the courts because the legislature or the governor could not agree. In other word, redistricting has been conducted by a body of non-legislators for four of the last five redistricting plans. In these years, legislators spent an enormous amount of time on redistricting only to have the lines drawn by the Supreme Court, an inefficient way to run government. History tells us that our redistricting process needs to be reformed otherwise we face a costly and time consuming repeat of what happened before. SF 86 is a severe impediment to reform.

Indeed, the increasingly deep partisan divisions in our state and country should compel us to seek an approach to redistricting that will restore the public's trust and confidence in government.

At the House hearings on the companion bill HF 314, there was discussion of redistricting commissions in other states. However, the discussion did little to clarify the differences in the way these commissions are formed or operate or the impact on the legislature's ability to have the final say on redistricting.

Some commissions, like Arizona and California, are partisan or bi-partisan where the commission members are specifically identified as Republicans, Democrats or Independents.

In Iowa there is the Legislative Services Agency, a body of civil servants committed to nonpartisanship that prepares redistricting plans.

In 2008, former Gov. Arne Carlson and Vice President Walter Mondale proposed a non-partisan redistricting commission consisting of five retired judges. These judges would be bound to the Code of Judicial Conduct.

In both the Iowa and Carlson-Mondale plans, the legislature has the final decision on the redistricting map. The ability to redistrict is not taken away from the legislature. Both methods are non-partisan and eliminate the inherent conflict of interest when legislators are allowed to select their own voters. If SF 86 is enacted, it would cripple the legislature by eliminating these viable options for redistricting.

The League of Women Voters Minnesota asks the Members to oppose SF 86.