



Honorable Harry Niska
Chair, Rules and Legislative Administration Committee
Minnesota House of Representatives
KaciePetersen@house.mn.gov

Re: Statement Concerning House File 550

Chair Niska and Members of the Committee:

Clean Elections Minnesota (“CEM”) respectfully submits this statement concerning HF 550 and in support of an amendment to the Minnesota Constitution creating a redistricting commission. CEM is a nonprofit-nonpartisan organization working for a healthy and inclusive democracy. Our work promotes every American’s right to participate in the democratic process and we endorse the notion that although not all Minnesotans agree on everything, we all should believe in American Democracy.

CEM continues to support the establishment of an **independent, nonpartisan** redistricting commission because elections should be decided by voters, not by the politicians competing for the support of those very same voters. The foundation of our Democracy, our long-standing chosen system of governance, is the proposition that each and every one of us have value; that each and every one of us has a say; that each and every one of us - if we are truly to be free – has the right to be heard; that each and every one of us has the right – indeed the obligation – to vote and to have that vote counted.

In the last decade, a record-breaking number of states have passed ballot measures intended to make the process of redrawing legislative districts more bipartisan or nonpartisan and transparent. These are citizen-led efforts cheered by reform advocates as a win for American democracy, a sign that voters from both parties want to end partisan gerrymandering, or the drawing of lines for political advantage. Truly independent redistricting commissions are state-based solutions that change the system of drawing electoral maps to a more open process that is reflective of citizen voices. CEM believes this helps make politicians more accountable and responsive to their constituents.

But partisanship still prevails in many of these citizen-led efforts, leading to gridlock or unfairly drawn legislative district lines.

In Virginia, the first attempt to draw a “fair” legislative map collapsed in acrimony in 2020 and headed for that state’s Supreme Court. Virginia’s **bipartisan** redistricting commission, new at the time with support from two-thirds of Virginia voters – was dogged by partisanship from the outset, with Democrats and Republicans working with separate consultants to produce separate maps and failing to merge them.



A similar process played out at the same time in New York, where 58% of voters approved a measure in 2014 to create a bipartisan redistricting commission, and the commission's Democrats and Republicans also came up with separate maps, failing at the start to reach a compromise.¹

And in Ohio, where nearly three-quarters of voters approved a 2018 ballot measure to end partisan gerrymandering, a new redistricting commission failed to gain the required bipartisan approval for its state legislative maps. As a result, those maps were only in place for four years, including for national elections in 2022 and 2024, rather than 10 years.²

That independent redistricting commissions are being undermined by the same partisan forces they're supposed to be alleviating raises a troubling question: Is it even possible to redraw districts in a way that would be perceived by both sides as fair?

One difference today is that more Americans are paying attention. They are tired of waiting for the courts to act and do not believe politicians will ever fix the problem of gerrymandering.

According to one poll in 2019³, more than two-thirds of Americans are at least familiar with the term gerrymandering. And majorities in both parties say they would prefer congressional districts be drawn with "no partisan bias," even if that meant their own party would not win as many seats.

The trend is changing. Today more than 21 states have some form of redistricting commission.

In January 2019, the nonprofit pro-Democracy researcher Campaign Legal Center released a bipartisan poll⁴ that found more than two-thirds of Americans at least familiar with the term gerrymandering, and a strong opposition to gerrymandering among likely 2020 general election voters. This poll reported broad, bipartisan support for the creation of independent redistricting commissions, which voters supported in all five states where it was put to a vote in the 2018 cycle. At least 60 percent of Democrats, Independents and Republicans supported the creation of independent redistricting commissions.

In July 2018 the Brennan Center for Justice released research into redistricting commissions after interviews of more than 100 stakeholders in seven jurisdictions.⁵ They found "a compelling case that putting commissions in charge of redistricting can significantly reduce many of the worst abuses associated with redistricting and improve outcomes and satisfaction across the stakeholder spectrum — but only if commissions are carefully designed and structured to promote independence and incentivize discussion and compromise."

¹ New York Redistricting Tests Democratic Opposition to Gerrymandering, [washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/09/27/new-york-redistricting-democrats](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/09/27/new-york-redistricting-democrats)

² Nonpartisan redistricting? Reform efforts meet reality, [csmonitor.com/USA/Politics/2021/1012/Nonpartisan-redistricting-Reform-efforts-meet-reality](https://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Politics/2021/1012/Nonpartisan-redistricting-Reform-efforts-meet-reality)

³ ALG Research / GS Strategy Group, campaignlegal.org/sites/default/files/2019-01/CLC%20Bipartisan%20Redistrictig%20Poll.pdf

⁴ New Bipartisan Poll Shows Support for Supreme Court to Establish Clear Rules for Gerrymandering, campaignlegal.org/press-releases/new-bipartisan-poll-shows-support-supreme-court-establish-clear-rules-gerrymandering

⁵ Redistricting Commissions: What Works, brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/redistricting-commissions-what-works



Based on its research, the Brennan Center recommended reforms to maximize the independence and effectiveness of these commissions⁶:

- An independent selection process coupled with an element of randomness.
- Clear criteria for map drawing.
- A commission of nine to 15 members to ensure diversity and guard against deadlock.
- Map-approval rules requiring support from each major political block.
- Strong transparency that makes commission proceedings accessible and assessable.
- An enforceable guarantee of adequate funding for its operations.
- A timeframe allowing for public hearings, obtaining feedback, making necessary adjustments, and drawing final maps.

CEM endorses these principles for establishing a redistricting commission for Minnesota. We would also support the additional following principles, and urge legislators to consider them as HF 550 moves through the legislative process:

- Compliance with the federal Voting Rights Act.
- Not disproportionately favoring any political party or incumbent.
- Respecting communities of interest and specifically including marginalized communities of color.
- Respecting county, city, and township lines.
- Geographic compactness.
- Contiguity of districts.
- Equal population representation.

We join others in urging the creation of an independent redistricting commission in Minnesota that reflects best practices and lessons learned from across the country, and can be supported by all stakeholders, especially by those of impacted or marginalized communities.

Respectfully submitted,

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Strategic Advisor
On behalf of Clean Elections Minnesota

⁶ See also, 2020 Redistricting Criteria-Updated August 27,2024, National Conference of State Legislatures, ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/2020-redistricting-criteria