



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF PENNSYLVANIA

MAKING DEMOCRACY WORK

January 12, 2016

Dear Legislative Interview Coordinator,

Thank you for your work contacting and speaking with your local legislators on behalf of your local League and the Pennsylvania League. As you know, the purposes of these legislative interviews are:

- To learn where legislators stand on specific issues so the League can be a better advocate on our positions.
- To educate legislators about issues the League cares about and to let them know our position on those issues.
- To help Leagues build a relationship with their legislators.

Please return legislative interview responses to the LWVPA office by Friday, March 4, 2016.

Scheduling Interviews

Legislators tend to have very busy schedules, and while it is important for them to meet with constituents (you!), anything you can do to make the interview more convenient for them will help.

Other points to consider regarding scheduling legislative interviews:

- Interviews should be scheduled for a time convenient to your local legislator and should generally take place in the district.
- Prior to scheduling any interviews, please coordinate with any other local Leagues that share your legislators. If you are unsure whether there are overlapping districts, please call the LWVPA office at (717) 234-1576 or email info@palwv.org.
- You can find contact information for your local legislators on the Pennsylvania General Assembly's website at <http://www.legis.state.pa.us/>.

Interview Format

When deciding on the format that works best for your League, consider the purposes of the legislative interview. Leagues have used a variety of formats for the interview: at the legislator's district office, a local restaurant for coffee or lunch, a cable TV studio, etc.

Confidentiality

Before the interview begins, both legislators and local League members conducting the interview should establish whether the interview may be made public or must be kept private. **Please note: the legislators' answers will be used in LWVPA and local League advocacy efforts.** However, if the legislator prefers the interview to be private, your local League may not release any content from the interview to your general membership.

If you conduct a private interview, and the board decides it would like to publish a report of the interview, you must ask if that is acceptable to the legislator. Also ask if you can tape the interview and/or take notes. (Try not to be obtrusive or take up time when taking notes or tape recording.)

No report should be published, even in your League newsletter, without the clear approval of the legislator.

Preparing for and Conducting the Interview

1. Before the interview:

- a. Provide each legislator with a list of the questions you intend to ask. You may want to include additional fact sheets with the questions if you believe they would be helpful.
- b. Decide who will take notes or handle taping.
- c. Decide who will ask each question.
- d. Make sure you understand the issues and are able to ask follow-up questions if necessary. For quick reference, fact sheets on the major issues are included in this packet.
- e. Research whether the legislator has taken any positions on issues referenced in the questions. You may want to check the legislator's website for this information.

2. At the interview:

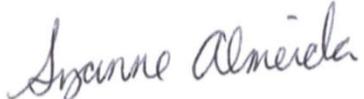
- a. Listen carefully!
- b. Maintain nonpartisanship – you are representing the League.
- c. Be sure your record of the interview(s) includes the name of the legislator responding to each question. Clarify whether answers are on or off the record.
- d. Be cordial and pleasant even if you disagree on an issue.
- e. Be sure to thank them if you know they supported or sponsored bills the League has supported -- especially redistricting reform.
- f. Don't be afraid to ask follow-up questions, especially if they haven't really answered the question.
- g. Save your lobbying for another visit. This is not the time to argue League positions.
- h. Be sure to ask the legislators about their own legislative priorities and report this on the response form.
- i. Educate legislators about the League and invite them to join the League, or renew membership.
 - i. Take membership applications with you.
 - ii. Give them sample copies of League publications – your own, LWVPA and/or LWVUS.
 - iii. Be sure they have the LWVPA Citizen Information Center toll-free phone number (800-692-7281) and remind them of the services it provides.
- j. Be alert for signals that the interview should be coming to a close.
- k. Do your best to end the interview on a positive note.

3. After the interview:

- a. Send a written thank-you note immediately after your interview. You may want to send an email thank-you note that day and then follow up with a hand-written note.
- b. **Complete the report form and answer sheets and send them by March 4, 2016** to:
LWVPA, 226 Forster Street, Harrisburg, PA 17102 OR email them to info@palwv.org.

If you have any other questions, or if there is anything we can do to support your legislative interview process, please don't hesitate to contact us. These interviews are a crucial part of our legislative advocacy efforts because they help to forge a relationship with legislators as well as give us an idea of where legislators stand on our issues. We couldn't do it without you!

In League,



Suzanne Almeida
Executive Director



LWVPA Supports Redistricting Reform

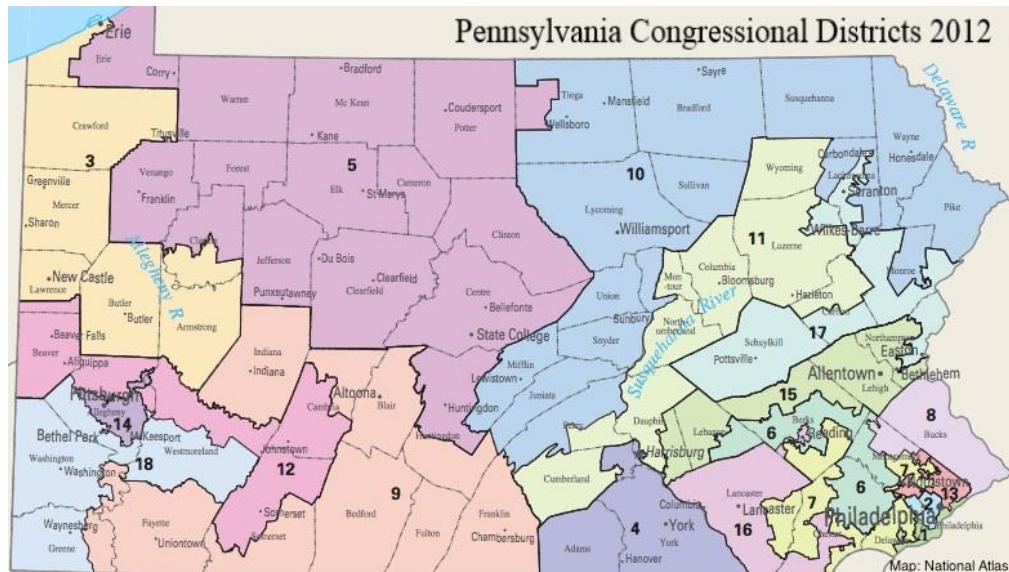
Every 10 years, after the decennial census, states redraw the boundaries of congressional and legislative districts in order to meet the constitutional requirement of one person, one vote.

Legislative redistricting is governed by PA's Constitution. Article II, Section 16 specifies that all state House and Senate districts contain a relatively equal number of constituents; that the shape of each district be compact and contiguous; and that no county, municipality or ward be divided unless absolutely necessary.

Under Article II, Section 17, the boundaries of the state legislature's House and Senate districts are determined by a 5-member Legislative Reapportionment Commission. Four members are the leaders of the Republican and Democratic legislative caucuses. These four select a fifth member who serves as chair. If the legislative leaders cannot agree on a chair, which is usually the case, the selection is turned over to the PA Supreme Court.

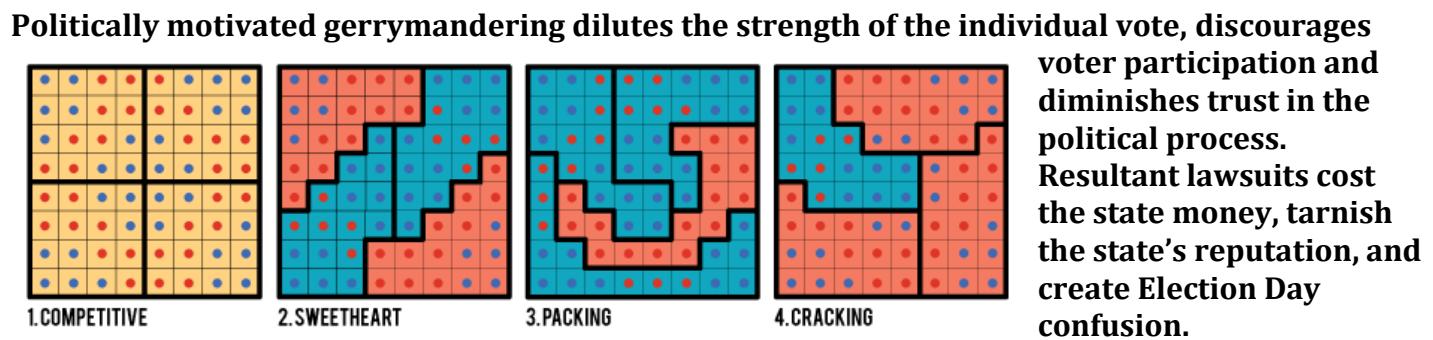
Congressional districts are determined through legislation passed by the Senate and House and signed by the governor. There is currently nothing in Pennsylvania law that says congressional districts must be compact and contiguous and avoid dividing counties and municipalities.

The current system has resulted in a partisan process yielding districts that ignore the demands of compact and contiguous and regularly divide counties, municipalities, and wards. Pennsylvania's districts have been repeatedly described in national media as among the most gerrymandered in the nation.



In the most recent redistricting, Congressional District 7 snakes through parts of five southeastern counties and in some places is as narrow as 800 feet; five district offices are needed to serve that district. Congressional District 12 stretches through parts of nine counties and is barely contiguous at one point. That district requires seven district offices; four have limited hours.

In 2011, more than a dozen petitions were filed challenging the new lines, most consolidated into Holt vs. 2011 Redistricting Commission. The PA Supreme Court granted the petitions and rejected the legislative map on the grounds that the lines violated state constitutional requirements of compactness and adherence to the integrity of political subdivisions.



Changing the way redistricting is done in Pennsylvania requires amending the state constitution. Proposed amendments must be passed in two consecutive sessions of the General Assembly and then go to the voters for approval at the first primary or general election that occurs at least three months after the amendment is passed.

The League believes that redistricting should advance the fundamental purposes of representative democracy by giving the people a meaningful choice in electing their representatives and by holding government accountable to the people. District boundaries should

- Protect the voting rights of minorities.
- Promote competitiveness and partisan fairness.
- Respect political subdivisions and communities of interest.
- Encourage geographical compactness and respect for natural geographic features and barriers.

The redistricting process should:

- Assign both legislative and congressional redistricting power to an independent commission.
- Ensure transparency of the process and a meaningful opportunity for interested parties and for the public to participate effectively.
- Require strict adherence to clearly defined anti-gerrymandering standards.

Proposed SB 484 would assign redistricting to an independent Citizen's Congressional and Legislative Redistricting Commission composed of a politically diverse group of qualified members of the voting public chosen to assure the fairness of the process. Districts would be redrawn using modern mapping software and would consider municipal boundaries, contiguous territory, compactness and communities of interest. Commission members would not be allowed to hold public or party office, or be related or work for those who hold office.

Find out more:

- Pennsylvania Redistricting: This official webpage for the 2011 Legislative Redistricting Commission includes interactive maps of the final legislative and congressional redistricting plans. <http://www.redistricting.state.pa.us/>
- Citizens Guide to Redistricting http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1647221
- Redistricting Hearings by the PA Bar Association Constitutional Review Commission <http://pabarcrc.org/mo/lrsubmissions.asp>

The League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania is a founding member of the Keystone Votes Coalition and is proud to advocate alongside other coalition members for programs and policies to update Pennsylvania's voting system. LWVPA helped craft the material below and will be using responses to legislative questions to help Keystone Votes set reform agenda for the year ahead.

Keystone Votes: The Coalition for Modern Elections

About

Keystone Votes is a coalition of leading Pennsylvania-based and national voting advocates and election administration experts working to update Pennsylvania's election system. Pennsylvania's voting system works well, but we need to update it to reflect how people live today.

The Case for Updating Pennsylvania's Election System

According to unofficial results from the Department of State, just under 25% of registered voters cast a ballot in the last general election held in November 2015. That means that only a quarter of our population is making important decisions about who leads our towns and cities, as well as our courtrooms and state legislature.

For the 2012 presidential election, Pennsylvania ranked 29th out of all 50 states in participation, according to data from the U.S. Elections Project. Even though Pennsylvania's election system works well for many voters, low voter turnout compels us to make some updates, so it works better for all voters.

We should start by updating Pennsylvania's voting system to make it **easier and more convenient** for citizens to cast their ballots, including those who already vote regularly. Pennsylvanians are busier than ever; work schedules and family commitments vary. Our voting system needs to accommodate these new realities and reflect the needs of today's citizens.

- Working people, especially nurses, doctors, firefighters, police officers, caregivers, and others who work long hours and double shifts, struggle to make it to the polls on Election Day.
- Although a new online voter registration system is making it easier, lifelong voters who move—even in their own town or city—as well as new voters frequently miss 30-day deadlines, which prevents them from voting.
- Even voters who have never missed an election would welcome more flexibility and choice in deciding when and how to cast a vote.

We should also update Pennsylvania's election system to ensure all of our citizens—particularly seniors, veterans and working people—have an **equal opportunity to make their voices heard**.

- Voters with disabilities and seniors sometimes can't vote without assistance from family, friends or caregivers who may be busy on Election Day.
- Increasing flexibility and choice reduces barriers to voting and gives all citizens the opportunity to participate in our elections.

Other states have taken common sense steps to update their voting systems, offering voters more options for when and how they can register and vote and using technology to make elections run more smoothly. In many states, these kinds of changes began several years ago. Pennsylvania can learn from the experience of other states and adopt updates that have been **tested and proven** throughout the country.

What We're For

Keystone Votes supports the updates below and encourages the General Assembly to consider them as well as other ideas to strengthen Pennsylvania's voting system. These ideas have been a success in states across the country. We know they work, they won't be too costly, and they'll preserve the integrity of our elections. But we also know that we don't have a monopoly on good ideas and are interested in supporting all efforts to modernize and strengthen Pennsylvania's elections.

- **Optional Vote by Mail** – Pennsylvania already allows voters who cannot make it to the polls on Election Day due to sickness or work obligations out of the municipality of residence to cast absentee ballots by mail. This update would allow all voters to use this option without having to provide an excuse.
- **Early Voting** – Early voting allows any voter to cast a ballot prior to Election Day. Early in-person voting locations, times, and voting periods vary in implementation from state to state. Early voting works best when it is offered over at least two weeks, allows people to vote at night and on weekends to accommodate different schedules, and is offered at a variety of locations to make it convenient for voters.
- **Same Day Registration** – With same day registration, voters can update registration records or register at their polling place on Election Day. Many citizens become most interested and engaged in elections in the final weeks, when campaigns reach their peak. Pennsylvania voters are required to register or update their registrations 30 days before an election in order to participate. Same day registration eliminates this deadline and makes it possible for citizens to register when they are most engaged.
- **Youth Preregistration** – Youth preregistration allows young people ages 16 and 17 to complete a registration form even if they will not be old enough to vote in the next election, ensuring they are on the rolls and able to vote once they are eligible. Youth preregistration is usually facilitated through a state's department of motor vehicles and through high schools.

Learn More

Go to www.KeystoneVotes.org to learn more about Keystone Votes, join the coalition and get more information about updates to Pennsylvania's election system.



MERIT SELECTION OF APPELLATE JUDGES IS GOOD FOR PENNSYLVANIANS

- **Changing how we choose our statewide judges is a matter of fighting for equality, justice and security for all Pennsylvanians.**
- **Merit selection focuses on qualifications**, not on being a good campaigner, fundraiser or having a good ballot position. Talented, qualified judges are the foundation of an effective and efficient judicial system.
- **Merit selection levels the playing field for all litigants.**
- **Merit selection takes politics out of the courtroom.** This leads to more consistent, predictable judicial opinions. Electing judges is a partisan process for a non-partisan job.
 - By removing the need to please voters, merit selection ensures cases are tried in the court of law, not the court of public opinion.
- **Merit selection removes the perception that “justice is for sale” to attorneys and special interests who contribute to judicial campaigns or through runaway independent expenditures.**
 - In the 2015 PA Supreme Court race, well over \$16 million was spent by the candidates and special interests with a vested interest in getting their chosen candidates on the bench.
- **Electing judges undermines the public’s confidence in the judiciary.**
 - In a 2010 poll¹, 93% of Pennsylvanians want the opportunity to vote on a constitutional amendment on whether to change the way we select statewide appellate judges.
 - In a 2013 poll², 87% of voters nationwide believe that judges’ decisions are influenced by donations.
 - 76% of Pennsylvanians¹ believe that judges are influenced by campaign contributions and 73% of Pennsylvanians¹ don’t believe that the most qualified judges are elected.
 - 62% of Pennsylvanians¹ support merit selection for appellate court judges
- **Merit selection promotes diversity on the bench.** In Pennsylvania, there has only ever been one African-American elected to the Supreme Court and no other racial minorities. Merit selection opens opportunities to those without financial or political resources or traditionally electable backgrounds, such as business or criminal defense.
- Pennsylvania is one of only 7 states that elects **all** judges in **partisan** elections.
- **Supporting merit selection is the right thing to do. It is a commonsense good government reform.** Merit selection gets judges out of the fundraising and campaigning business and takes politics out of the courtroom. Pennsylvanians deserve a judicial system they can have confidence in.

¹ The 2010 poll that is cited here was conducted by Public Opinion Strategies. It was commissioned by PMC and funded by American Judicature Society, Committee for Economic Development and Justice at Stake.

² This survey of 1200 registered voters nationwide was conducted by 20/20 Insight and had a margin of error of +/- 2.8 percent.



MERIT SELECTION PROPOSAL— House Bill 1336

- Merit selection is a **hybrid appointive/elective system** of choosing appellate judges.
 - Merit selection is different from the federal appointment system, which is a pure appointment process where judges are appointed for life.
- **Only appellate court judges would be chosen by merit selection.** Appellate court judges are those that sit on the Supreme, Superior and Commonwealth Courts and must run statewide. Local judges, including magisterial district judges and judges on the Courts of Common Pleas would still be elected by people who know them and believe they would be good judges.
- Merit selection involves a four step process to select appellate court judges:
 1. **Recommendation by the nominating commission:** A bipartisan citizens' nominating commission made up of lawyers and non-lawyers would evaluate judicial applicants and send a short list of the most qualified candidates to the Governor.
 - **Current nominating commission composition proposal:**
 - Members selected by legislature;
 - Members nominated by Governor; and
 - **Nominating commission members must:**
 - Be a Pennsylvania resident for at least 1 year prior to appointment
 - Be at least 18 years old
 - Not hold office in any political party or political organization, or hold any elected or appointed public office; or
 - Not be a Pennsylvania employee.
 2. **Nomination by the Governor:** The Governor must nominate an individual from the list and send the nominee to the Senate.
 3. **Confirmation by the Senate:** The Senate must vote to confirm the nominee.
 - Legislation would include timelines and tie-breaker mechanisms to prevent logjams.
 4. **Retention by the public:** After confirmation, a judge would sit for 4 years before going before the voters in a nonpartisan retention (yes-no) election for a 10 year term, and every 10 years thereafter.
- **Qualifications for judges will be written into the constitution.** Judges must:
 - Be a lawyer who has been in the legal field for at least 10 years;
 - Have demonstrated integrity, judicial temperament, professional competence and experience and commitment to the community.
- **Only voters can change the way we select our judges. Reform is up to all of us!**

Pennsylvanians for Modern Courts is a statewide nonpartisan court reform organization.
PMCAction is a related nonprofit that lobbies for court reform initiatives.
More information is available at www.pmconline.org and www.judgesonmerit.org.