

Testimony to the Courts, Corrections and Justice Committee

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Chairmen and members of the Committee, thank you for allowing the League of Women Voters of New Mexico present to you on our ideas on the need for reform of the redistricting process in New Mexico.

My name is Dick Mason and I a member of the leadership team of the League of Women Voters of New Mexico. With me is Mary Wilson, who is past President of the LWV of the United States. Mary has done extensive research on various redistricting models in the United States. She will present her views on the strengths and weaknesses of those models and what she believes are the crucial components of a fair redistricting process.

Let me start by giving an overview of why the League believes New Mexico needs to reform its redistricting system.

As you can probably tell from my accent, I am originally from Massachusetts. Massachusetts was the home of Eldridge Gerry, whose blatant attempt, in 1812, to shape a congressional district to his party's advantage gave rise to the term "gerrymandering". Massachusetts is also the home of former Speaker of the House Tom Finneran who, 2002, was convicted of lying to the FBI about his attempt to shape the state legislature districts in a way that assured that minorities continued to be underrepresented. So my former home state has a long and sordid history of redistricting shenanigans, but it is not alone. Leads you to believe that there may be something wrong with the process

So what about New Mexico? Let's look at the last two redistricting processes.

In 2001, a special session of the legislature that cost over \$700,000, developed a redistricting map that was vetoed by Governor Johnson. The final redistricting map was eventually redrawn by the New Mexico Supreme Court in 2002. I don't have a full estimate of the total cost.

In 2011, a special session passed State Legislative redistricting maps along straight party lines. The Governor vetoed that plans and this led to a number of lawsuits Eventually, the court appointed a special master to finalize the maps. The Senate map was finalized in January, 2012, but the final House map wasn't approved until the last of February, 2012. This left many candidates up in the air. The Associated Press estimated that the total cost of the New Mexico redistricting was 8 million dollars.

But even more important than the cost is what this whole process does to the democratic process. It undermines citizens' confidence in the political process and brings into question whether citizens are getting the representation they deserve. I think it was said best by former Republican Representative from Oklahoma, Mickey Edwards, when he spoke at the League of Women Voters national convention. Representative Edwards said – and I paraphrase: We need redistricting reform so that we can assure that "constituents pick their legislators rather than legislators pick their constituents".

There are alternative ways states can conduct redistricting. I know some members of this Committee have proposed some alternatives. Mary Wilson will discuss how other states have conducted redistricting and what features of the various alternatives the League believes are most crucial to real redistricting reform.