



For Immediate Release
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Amending Michigan’s Constitution to End “Rigged” Elections

(Lansing) A grassroots group of Michigan voters has announced an effort to take politicians out of the redistricting process.

“Voters Not Politicians,” a nonpartisan ballot question committee, is seeking to amend the Michigan Constitution in 2018 to create an independent Citizens’ Redistricting Commission. The Commission would be responsible for drawing Michigan’s congressional and state legislative districts (a process known as redistricting), taking the process out of the hands of politicians.

Currently, the political party in power in the state legislature draws the lines. Using voter data and sophisticated computer programs, politicians are able to select their voters with precision, effectively determining the outcome of an election long before election day. Under Voters Not Politicians’ proposal, current and former politicians, lobbyists, political consultants, major campaign donors and other political insiders would be ineligible to serve on the Citizens’ Redistricting Commission.

“Our goal is to take political gamesmanship out of redistricting and give this critical task back to the voters through a nonpartisan Citizens’ Commission,” said ballot question committee spokesperson Katie Fahey.

Voters Not Politicians is committed to the following core principles:

- Politicians, given their inherent conflict of interest, should not be in charge of drawing district maps
- Michigan’s representatives in government should reflect the political views of the state overall
- Minority communities must be assured fair and adequate representation
- Partisan gerrymandering—the practice of manipulating district lines to protect incumbents, political parties or individual candidates—must end
- Communities of common interest should be preserved
- Districts should be compact and contiguous

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“In the 2016 election for the Michigan House of Representatives, 91 out of 110 races were decided by margins of 10% or larger,” noted Dr. Davia Downey, Assistant Professor in the School of Public, Nonprofit and Health Administration at Grand Valley State University. “In Michigan’s 16 races for Congress, the winning candidates won by a margin of at least 13.7%; 12 out of the 16 races were decided by more than 15%. Politicians, not voters, are deciding who wins.”

Dr. John Hanieski, an independent economics consultant and former chairman of the Detroit/Wayne County Port Authority, pointed out that the current system has produced congressional and legislative districts that are deliberately distorted to protect incumbents and the ruling political party.

“Michigan historically has been a middle-of-the-road state, with the two major parties generally receiving virtually the same number of votes for the Legislature and Congress. The Legislature and Congressional delegations should reflect that fact. In 2016, the difference between the two major parties’ state House vote was just 3,000 votes (0.07%). But the maps drawn by the politicians and their consultants in secret meetings gave one party a 63-47 advantage in the House. Every other election in Michigan in this century has been similarly distorted by the mapmakers.”

“Gerrymandering is a national disgrace, practiced by both political parties whenever and wherever they get the chance. However, elections are a state function, so a national solution is not possible. Reform must be achieved state-by-state,” said Fahey. “Our goal is to repair the system in Michigan, and give our representation back to the people. Voters, not politicians, should be deciding the outcomes of our elections.”

The petition drive will need to gather 315,654 valid signatures in a 180-day period. Petitions will be submitted to the state Board of Canvassers in the spring. Prior to filing ballot language with the Board of Canvassers, the ballot question committee will hold Town Hall meetings across Michigan to engage voters and solicit input on policy. Town Halls have already been scheduled for Detroit, Livonia, Marquette, Petoskey, Jackson, Sandusky, Alpena and Houghton Lake.

About Our Spokespersons

Katie Fahey launched the non-partisan Count MI Vote <www.countmivote.org> in 2016. It has grown to more than 2,500 members across Michigan. The organization's sole policy agenda is reforming the way congressional and legislative district maps are drawn to eliminate political bias. Fahey is a 2011 graduate of Aquinas College with a dual Bachelor of Science in Sustainable Business and Community Leadership. She has worked in the sustainability field for the last 6 years and currently as the program coordinator for a non-profit environmental organization.

Dr. Davia Downey teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in local politics, public policy, public administration, economic and community development. Prior to joining the faculty at GVSU in 2011, Professor Downey served as a research and graduate assistant for the Global Urban Studies Program at Michigan State University. Professor Downey holds a PhD in political science from Michigan State University (2011), a Masters of Public Administration from Eastern Michigan University (2005) and a BA in music performance from Albion College (1999).

Dr. John Hanieski earned his Ph.D. in Economics from Purdue University. He joined the Michigan Department of Commerce in 1973 and ultimately rose to the position of Chief Economist. Some of his positions include Chairman of the Detroit Wayne County Port Authority and Chief Executive Officer of the Kalamazoo CEO Council. Dr. Hanieski is a Life Member of the Michigan Economic Developers Association and is the recipient of numerous awards. He is President of Economics Consulting Services.

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