

REDISTRICTING REFORM FREQUENTLY ASKS QUESTIONS (FAQ)

This document answers these key questions about redistricting reform.

1. **What is redistricting?**
 2. **Why is redistricting reform needed in Washington state?**
 3. **What is People First Redistricting?**
 4. **Why work on reform now if state redistricting isn't scheduled until 2031?**
 5. **What are the goals of People First Redistricting reform?**
 6. **What will it take to ensure redistricting reform is complete by 2031?**
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 8. **What authority and expertise does LWVWA have to champion redistricting reform?**
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1. What is redistricting?

In the United States, we vote for our representatives based on where we live – in voting districts. As population changes, the voting district maps need to be adjusted. Redistricting is the process of redrawing existing voting district boundaries to adjust for population changes. The redistricting process takes place every 10 years, following the completion of the national Census. In Washington state, the map drawing process for legislative and congressional districts is completed by a 5-person Redistricting Commission. Legislative leaders from the two largest parties in each house of the legislature appoint four voting members, and these voting members appoint the fifth non-voting chairperson. These maps matter. Decisions have significant consequences on the political power of every group in Washington. Where these lines are drawn can affect every other issue.

2. **Why is redistricting reform needed in Washington state?**

Washington state's legislative and congressional map-drawing process is outdated and broken. The 2021 commission failed dramatically in numerous ways. A partisan and nontransparent commission failed to produce maps on time and the maps were declared discriminatory in federal court. Redistricting must be representative, transparent, and accountable. The people of Washington state deserve better. We deserve a process that puts people over party. We deserve People First Redistricting.

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The state's map-drawing process was created in 1983. Significant changes in the state's demographics are not reflected or represented in the commission.

The 2021 Commission failed to create maps that represent the people of Washington. A good outreach process was muted. Incumbent protection and partisan interests biased district line decisions. Commissioners worked behind closed doors in violation of the Open Public Meetings Act, rushed to approve incomplete maps, and missed the constitutionally mandated deadline; even noncontroversial modifications were not made. The state Supreme Court let the incomplete maps stand despite the missed deadline. The commission settled lawsuits for lack of transparency and for illegally firing an employee.

In August 2023, a federal court judge declared that Legislative District 15 was discriminatory against Latino residents under the federal Voting Rights Act. District lines must be redrawn before the 2024 elections.

The people of Washington State deserve an open and transparent process – not a bi-partisan gerrymander. The current process gives us few competitive districts, protects incumbents, and puts partisan interests above community needs. Washington state residents deserve a process that gives each of us the opportunity to elect the representatives of our choosing. LWVWA is calling the reformed process People First Redistricting.

3. What is People First Redistricting?

People First Redistricting puts people's interests above partisan tradeoffs. This approach is transparent and accountable, maximizes opportunities for involvement, and ensures the broadest possible representation. People First Redistricting produces fully vetted maps designed to best serve the people of Washington.

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The League of Women Voters believes the redistricting process is best managed by an independent special commission, with membership that reflects the full diversity of the state. The current system is a two party-based system. More than 40% of the people in Washington do not identify with either major party and are not represented in the current Commission structure. A People First Redistricting commission will include the two major political parties as well as other currently unrepresented voices. Commissioners will be selected through an application process rather than appointment by political parties.

The structure and processes defined for a People First Redistricting commission will be transparent, accountable, accessible, and representative.

4. Why work on reform now if state redistricting isn't scheduled until 2031?

Establishing People First Redistricting requires an amendment to the state's constitution. Accomplishing the necessary steps will require significant time, money, and people power. Work must be done now to build a movement for change and ensure the new commission is in place by 2031 redistricting.

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Reforming the structure, processes and procedures of the Washington State Redistricting Commission will require at least eight years of significant effort. Because a state constitutional amendment is required, there is a great deal of organizing, campaigning and movement building to do. Passing an amendment requires two steps:

1. Passage through the Legislature requires that two thirds of the Washington State House and Senate approve a bill to place redistricting reform on the ballot. The Governor must also sign.
2. Voters must approve the constitutional amendment by a simple majority at the general election after it passes the legislature.

To pass a state amendment, we will need to build a broad, dynamic coalition to support the reform. These partners will come from all over the state. Individuals, nonprofits, foundations, and government organization working in civil rights, democratic governance, voting reform and equitable representation will find common ground in working towards redistricting reform.

The Redistricting Task Force has identified the following pillars towards success:

- Build a strong field organizing capacity.
- Develop a robust network of allied organizations and individuals.
- Collect and analyze statewide data on redistricting reform support.
- Create strong policy and constitutional language.
- Lobby the legislature to pass a state constitutional amendment.
- Manage a statewide get-out-the-vote effort to pass the amendment at a general election.

We must begin the work now if the Commission is to be in place in time for the 2031 redistricting process.

5. What are the goals of People First redistricting?

People First Redistricting reform is focused on creating a redistricting process that maximizes involvement and trust and produces district lines that best represent the people of Washington State. The commission will include a diverse selection of commissioners representative of our state. As importantly, the commission's process will be well supported, accountable, transparent, and accessible to all.

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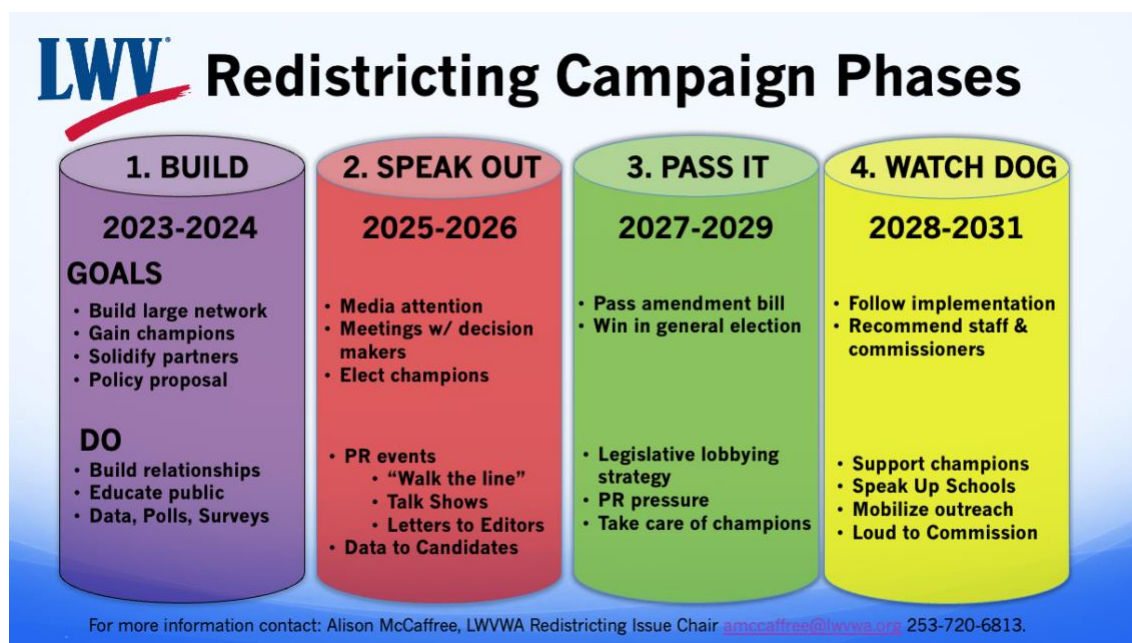
People First Redistricting reform produces a redistricting process of which everyone in Washington State can be proud. A process where all residents are included and heard and are assured that their needs will be considered. The process should result in maps that reflect the values of people, not parties. Voters must have a true opportunity to elect the people they wish to represent them.

The League believes that people first engagement and representation can only happen if the process includes these elements:

1. **New Structure:** People First Commission
2. **Enhanced Support:** Permanent professional staff
3. **True Accountability:** Ranked mapping criteria that is clearly defined
4. **Increased Transparency:** Timely negotiations in public
5. **Extensive Outreach:** Clear outreach and input processes
6. **Universal Access:** Translation, interpretation, and physical access

6. What will it take to ensure redistricting reform is complete by 2031?

The Washington State Redistricting Reform Task Force, led by LWVWA, has developed a four-phase strategy for achieving reform. The Task Force seeks first to build a broad network of individuals and organizations who will work together to write the policy proposal based on successful models. That network will then seek publicity and widen support. Together, we will find legislative champions and pressure the state to pass the necessary bills. Finally, LWVWA and its partners will be actively involved in the implementation of reform throughout the next redistricting cycle in 2031. Each of the four phases includes key activities and indicators of success.



7. Who needs to be involved in the redistricting reform?

This campaign is for everyone and needs many voices. Advocates should seek out and welcome supporters from all walks of life. This campaign is an opportunity to come together in the name of equitable representation. Many voices are needed to build the details of the constitutional amendment and policy proposals. When people feel included, they will support the proposed reforms.

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The League of Women Voters of Washington is leading this statewide reform effort and stands in solidarity with partners and allies, working together to find champions and collaborate with a diverse array of organizations. This is an opportunity to come together in the name of equitable representation. Long-standing advocates for social justice, new voters, underrepresented voices, tribal partners, civic organizations, and many others will find common ground in this work. Creative outreach that is robust, welcoming, and sustainable is key. The League will use its expertise and experience working with the Legislature and candidates for office to foster support for People First Redistricting reform.

8. What authority and expertise does LWVWA have to champion redistricting reform?

LWVWA members advocate in the community for redistricting reform under strong national and state League positions. LWVWA members are guided by over 90 years of leadership, a 2017 LWVWA review of the current redistricting process, and a 2023 state convention resolution supporting redistricting reform. The Redistricting Reform Task Force has been established to coordinate efforts.

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The League of Women Voters is uniquely positioned to lead this work. The League has established strong positions on this issue and successfully achieved reform at both the state and national level. The League has been a leader in redistricting reform since 1930.

In 2016, the League of Women Voters of the United States (LWVUS) consolidated positions on redistricting from across the country and approved the following national position:

“The League supports redistricting processes and enforceable standards that promote fair and effective representative at all levels of government with maximum opportunity for public participation.”

The League of Women Voters of Washington (LWVWA) chose to review the work of the past three Washington State Redistricting Commissions and published a detailed report in September of 2017. This report concluded:

“... the League of Women Voters of Washington will strive to move from the state’s bipartisan system to a more nearly nonpartisan, independent system by continuing to evaluate both short-term and long-term solutions as well as continuing to evaluate the success of states with alternative systems.”

From 2017 – 2021, hundreds of League members and allies worked to improve the Washington redistricting process and advocated for legislative improvements during the 2019 Legislative Session. From 2019 -2020, the LWVWA hosted Speak up Schools and Redistricting 101 educational seminars with the goal of encouraging people to testify and improve the quality, content, and diversity of input to our commissioners. The LWVWA held listening sessions across the State and presented a complete mapping solution to the Commission.

On May 7, 2023, at the League of Women Voters of Washington statewide convention, members overwhelmingly approved this Resolution – putting the full weight of the State League behind the reform effort.

“BE IT RESOLVED that the League of Women Voters of Washington fully supports the Redistricting Reform Campaign in the goal of passing a state constitutional amendment to create an independent people-focused commission...”

League members are encouraged to engage and respond on any issues that LWVWA supports but must do so in their own name. Speaking officially on behalf of LWVWA requires approval and can be arranged as needed.

The League’s mission of *empowering voter and defending democracy* strongly aligns with redistricting reform efforts. Our reputation for thoughtful, nonpartisan engagement makes us a recognized and respected voice, and a natural leader for this work. But we cannot do it alone.

9. How does LWVWA remain nonpartisan while advocating for People First Redistricting reform?

The League can be successful in reforming redistricting AND stay nonpartisan because:

- 1) Issues are not partisan.
- 2) Nonpartisan does NOT mean apolitical.
- 3) Democracy is a civil rights issue.

A broad coalition of support including representatives from both major political parties and other underrepresented constituencies is required to successfully implement People First Redistricting. While the League expects push back and challenges to our efforts and our nonpartisan status, the League welcomes the dialogue to deepen understanding.

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We can recognize the partisan nature of redistricting and at the same time uphold and reinforce the nonpartisan stance. Consider these excerpts from a blog by LWVUS CEO, Virginia Kase Solomon:

“The League of Women Voters of the United States is proud to be nonpartisan, neither supporting nor opposing candidates or political parties at any level of government, but always working on vital issues of concern to members and the public.”

“The League of Women Voters of the US was founded to be a nonpartisan voice for American women who wanted free, fair, and open elections, above all else.”

“Our founders believed that voters must always have the facts, no matter how difficult those facts could be to accept.”

Successful redistricting reform will require the support of both major parties. Two-thirds of the State Legislature must say yes to placing a constitutional amendment before Washington State voters. To succeed, the effort must be nonpartisan.

Both parties have a stake in preserving the current redistricting process. The League holds fast to these principles:

ISSUES ARE NOT PARTISAN

The League’s advocacy work is issued based. Our positions based on careful study and input from our members in communities across the country.

NONPARTISAN DOES NOT MEAN APOLITICAL

League members represent opinions and positions that can be found across the American political spectrum. What brings the League together is our commitment to voter empowerment—especially empowering women voters—and defending democracy.

DEMOCRACY IS A CIVIL RIGHTS ISSUE

The League will continue to uphold our nonpartisan values for fairness, justice, and equity because they form the foundation of a representative democracy.

TOGETHER WE CAN BRIDGE THE PARTISAN DIVIDE

The League, with our partners, will strive to create a stronger, more inclusive, just, and equitable democracy for American voters—a place where everyone has a voice.

And so:

- To the extent possible, the League will include party representatives in designing the redistricting commission structure.
- The League will find champions in both parties and ask these champions to join People First Redistricting reform.
- Pushback will likely come from both parties. That's to be expected. It means necessary compromise is at work.