

League of Women Voters of Wisconsin: Governor's budget includes plans for nonpartisan redistricting reform

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Contact: Erin Grunze, Executive Director
608-256-0827; egrunze@lwvwi.org

The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin is gratified to learn that Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers has announced his support for the adoption of a nonpartisan redistricting plan based on the "Iowa" model in his proposed biennium budget. Adoption of an "Iowa"-type model would be a vast improvement over the hyper-partisan gerrymandering process currently in use in Wisconsin, in which the majority party is able to draw maps to guarantee its own power and control.

Every ten years the state must realign the boundaries of legislative and Congressional districts to adjust for changes in population identified in the decennial census. Governor Evers has called for a plan that requires the nonpartisan Legislative Reference Bureau to draft a set of maps, based on strict nonpartisan criteria, and may not consider such things as the residence of incumbents or previous election results. The legislature must adopt or reject the plan; the LRB will draft a second plan if the first plan is rejected by the legislature. After a set maps is adopted by the legislature, public hearings must be held in all congressional districts to ensure that public understands the new maps. In the recent past, maps were drafted in secret with little or no opportunity for public input or review. These maps and non-transparent process lead to legal challenges that cost taxpayers millions in unnecessary spending.

The League of Women Voters has always advocated for the right of the public to have adequate opportunity to understand and review the actions of public officials. We have found that inserting policy items into the biennial budget generally reduces the opportunity for both the public and legislators to thoroughly assess the implications of such policy measures. While we applaud the governor's support of nonpartisan redistricting, we hope the legislature will join in support for this redistricting reform plan with the introduction of a stand alone bill. The bill for redistricting reform will receive the public review, discussion, and input it deserves. The League believes that ending partisan gerrymandering is critical for maintaining our democracy. We look forward to examining the governor's full budget proposal now that it is public.