

ARLINGTON CIVIC FEDERATION RESOLUTION ON FAIR REDISTRICTING

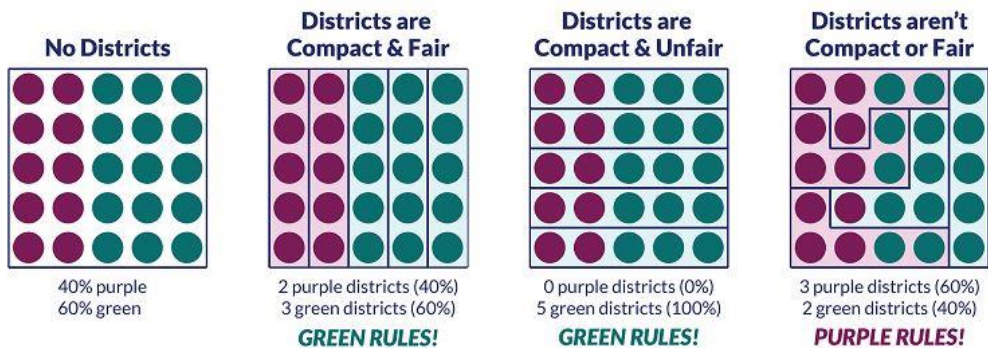
PROCEDURAL HISTORY

On September 26, 2017, the Legislative Committee of the Arlington Civic Federation met to consider a proposed resolution on Fair Redistricting. The draft resolution was unanimously approved as drafted. The resolution was introduced to the membership on October 3, 2017, at which time members had an opportunity to ask questions. Feedback from the membership at that time was to include in the resolution consideration of who should be appointed to the proposed redistricting commission. A follow-up meeting of the Legislative Committee was held on January 21, 2018 to review the draft and incorporate recommendations from the membership. The resolution was approved unanimously as revised. Voting aye during the committee meeting were Juliet Hiznay (Columbia Heights), Ronald Haddox (Columbia Heights), Donald Gurney (League of Women Voters), Sarah Shortall (Waverly Hills), Bennett Minton (Alcova Heights), and John Bloom (Boulevard Manor).

BACKGROUND

The proposed resolution is aimed at preventing gerrymandering by establishing an independent, impartial redistricting commission. The US Constitution mandates that electoral districts be adjusted periodically to reflect demographic changes. These changes are recorded by the federal census every ten years. Virginia allows state legislators to redraw district lines for all levels of the legislature. Thus, incumbent elected officials are empowered to draw boundaries in a way that serves partisan interests for an entire decade, a process widely known as gerrymandering. Gerrymandering erodes representational democracy by allowing members of the legislature to insulate themselves and to punish party members who are not voting “party line.” As indicated in the graphic below, voters are prevented from effectuating changes through their vote.

GERRYMANDERING SIMPLIFIED



Source: Inspired by <http://bit.ly/1Fi2bam>

vpap.org

There are active legal matters of significance in Virginia. At this time, a total of 11 Virginia state districts are currently under scrutiny as being racial gerrymandered in the *Bethune-Hill v. Virginia* case. This matter was remanded by the Supreme Court of the United States to the Eastern District of Virginia (Richmond Division) in March of 2017 for further proceedings.¹

The Legislative Committee strongly urges members to review additional documents prior to the membership meeting on February 6, 2018. The Committee has recommended for inclusion in the newsletter frequently asked questions prepared by League of Women Voters Fairfax² and a white paper that summarizes various studies (FN5). The full length film *Gerrymandered* is available on YouTube at the following link. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vD3ZZ-wzrHQ>

RESOLUTION ON FAIR REDISTRICTING

Whereas the Virginia state constitution currently vests the authority to apportion the Commonwealth into electoral districts for U.S. House and the Virginia House of Delegates and Virginia Senate solely in the General Assembly;³

Whereas the Virginia Constitution vests in the General Assembly authority to draw district maps for the U.S. House and Virginia Senate and House of Delegates;

Whereas the Virginia Constitution calls for districts to be “composed of contiguous and compact territory” and to “give, as nearly as is practicable, representation in proportion to the population of the district”;

Whereas a substantial majority of Virginians, across regions and political parties believe that an independent panel should handle redistricting, not the state legislature;⁴

Whereas studies indicate that Virginia’s congressional districts are among the least compact in the U.S.;⁵

Whereas states that have implemented an independent redistricting commission or other non-partisan process have established significantly more compact districts than those established by state legislatures or legislative commissions;⁶

¹ <https://www.brennancenter.org/legal-work/bethune-hill-v-virginia-board-elections>

² An Arlington Chapter of OneVirginia2021 has been formed, with an organizational meeting scheduled for February 10, 2018. <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/an-opportunity-to-work-for-fair-redistricting-in-virginia-this-is-a-call-for-grass-roots-action-tickets-41879274036>

³ *Virginia Constitution*, Article II, Section 6 - Apportionment
<https://law.lis.virginia.gov/constitution/article2/section6/>

⁴ “With Overwhelming Support for Nonpartisan Redistricting, Virginians Are Studying Ways to Make That Happen”, *The Virginia Newsletter*, June 2014
https://ceps.coopercenter.org/sites/default/files/Virginia_News_Letter_2014_Vol._90_No.4_0.pdf

⁵ Azavea, “Redrawing the Map on Redistricting 2012”, p. 7

https://s3.amazonaws.com/s3.azavea.com/com.redistrictingthenation/pdfs/Redistricting_The_Nation_Addendum.pdf

⁶ Azavea, “Redrawing the Map on Redistricting 2012”, p. 10

https://s3.amazonaws.com/s3.azavea.com/com.redistrictingthenation/pdfs/Redistricting_The_Nation_Addendum.pdf

Whereas we believe this change will strengthen the integrity of the election process by removing the ability of politicians to draw boundaries to their own benefit;

and

Whereas the next decennial reapportionment, using 2020 U.S. Census data, is due in 2021 and any constitutional change in the apportionment process to affect the 2021 redistricting takes 2-3 years and multiple approvals⁷ --

- A. By the General Assembly in 2019
- B. By the General Assembly, a second time in 2020, and
- C. By Virginia voters in November 2020

Now therefore, the Arlington County Civic Federation urges that the Virginia General Assembly pass legislation to amend the state constitution to transfer the redistricting authority from the Virginia General Assembly to an impartial, independent commission.

Be it further resolved, the Arlington County Civic Federation further recommends that (1) the composition of the commission should be designed to ensure that redistricting decisions are insulated from the interests of incumbents and political parties and instead are based on objective, nonpartisan criteria (e.g. compactness, contiguity, and community boundaries), and (2) the commission should ensure public participation and be fully transparent, (3) the commissioners be required to take an oath to make independent decisions that support the goal of ensuring proportional representation based on districts that are not politically or racially gerrymandered.

⁷Source: *Virginia Constitution*, Article XII, Section 1 - Amendments
<https://law.lis.virginia.gov/constitution/article12/section1/>