



**THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®**  
*O F W E S T C H E S T E R*

200 Hamilton Avenue • White Plains, New York 10601  
(914) 949-0507 • fax (914) 997-9354 • <http://www.watpa.org/lwv/>

***League of Women Voters of Westchester (LWVW)***  
***Statement on County Redistricting***  
***May 9, 2011***

Because both sides in the county redistricting debate have invoked the League of Women Voters name, we think we need to explain our position on this matter. Quite simply, we do not take any responsibility for either the process or the output of the process as they currently stand. The process has been extremely messy; and aspects of it have been questionable.

To review, the LWVW participated in a monitoring/advisory capacity in county redistricting following the 2000 census. We anticipated being asked to fill the same role after the 2010 census. In mid-April, the Chairman of the County Board of Legislators, Ken Jenkins, contacted past LWVW president Adelaide DiGiorgi and invited her to represent the League and participate in the Legislation Committee, Mrs. DiGiorgi accepted and recommended Dr. Janet Zagoria, Chair of the LWVW's County Government Committee, join the project. Although Chairman Jenkins did not specify what role we would play, we took it to be the same advisory one we had played before.

We attended our first committee meeting on Monday, April 18<sup>th</sup>, with the redistricting consultant, Dr. Andrew Beveridge, present only by telephone link. The following day, Mrs. DiGiorgi emailed John Nonna, Legislation Committee chair, to pass along the Suffolk County, NY, local law on redistricting which the League considers a model and to ask about Dr. Beveridge's qualifications. The Suffolk County law calls for an independent citizens commission to carry out the reapportionment of county seats.

We received no response to our suggestion for such a commission and, in fact, we did not pursue it at the next Legislation Committee meeting on April 21<sup>st</sup> because it was then clear that the redistricting process was already under way. The consultant had proposed merely "tweaking" the current districts because only a few deviated in population by 5% from the new norm of 55,830. The committee agreed. Moreover, legislators on the

committee were already in touch directly with Dr. Beveridge requesting adjustments to their districts. The two League members were, however, welcomed and free to join in the discussion.

On Monday, April 25<sup>th</sup>, the two Westchester County Board of Elections commissioners were present at the outset to answer questions that had developed about election districts. Consultant Beveridge was not there, but much paper had been distributed adjustments, Committee members worked to sort out the details, and the committee began planning for a public hearing on Monday, May 2<sup>nd</sup>. Legislator Peter Harckham also invited the LWVW to comment on the redistricting process, and Dr. Zagoria stated that she would like to see more transparency in the proceedings.

The following Thursday, before a scheduled committee meeting, Dr. Zagoria approached Mr. Nonna with a strong recommendation to open up the redistricting process. He made an effort to do so, asking for a district-by-district review of changes requested and the reasons for the requests. Dr. Beveridge was present. An issue had arisen in District 4, where a Republican contender for Democratic legislator Michael Kaplowitz's seat had been redistricted into District 1, led by Republican John Testa. Dr. Beveridge said that it was merely a matter of pushing District 1 to the Yorktown-Somers border.

The public hearing scheduled for Monday, May 2<sup>nd</sup>, at 7:00 p.m. Eight to ten citizens spoke in criticism of the redistricting process. Dr. Zagoria and a League colleague were present at the meeting, while Mrs. DiGiorgi watched via the Internet. The LWV members who were present learned that a Legislation Committee meeting had been held earlier that day which Dr. Beveridge had attended by phone. The League members had not received a formal notice, as was customary, but after the public hearing, a staff member did pass along to Dr. Zagoria a report of changes that had been made to the districts taking account of the fact that prisoners at the Bedford Correctional Institute and Sing Sing in Ossining should be counted in their home districts. A new public hearing was set for Monday, May 9<sup>th</sup>.

Under the current conditions, the LWVW cannot endorse the county redistricting process, and we wish to distance ourselves from the resulting product. We understand the committee is working to meet a June deadline. However, we do not believe this excuses the general sloppiness, if not partisan political nature, of the proceedings. Our experience clearly shows why independent entities, rather than legislators, should be in charge of reallocating electoral district seats after a census.

The League of Women Voters, a non-partisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues and influences public policy through education and advocacy.