



MICHIGAN VOTER POWER CAMPAIGN

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Forum Focuses on Redistricting Problems and Importance of Public Involvement

The Michigan Redistricting Collaborative sponsored *Draw the Line Michigan*, a forum about redistricting, at Schoolcraft College on March 14. Organized by LWVMI, with support from the Midwest Democracy Network, the event featured presentations on what to expect from this year's redistricting process, why it is important to citizens, and ways to have a voice in the process.

Keesha Gaskins, attorney with the Brennan Center for Justice, opened the program with an overview of redistricting. A key aspect of representative democracy, **redistricting should aim to represent communities that have common interests**. Instead, it is typically used to promote political goals, such as drawing safe seats for one or both parties or protecting incumbents. Gaskins reviewed the federal and state laws covering redistricting, noting that **Michigan's process is fully controlled by the Legislature** with no provisions for public comment on the plans.

Virginia Martinez, attorney from the Mexican American Legal and Educational Defense Fund, spoke about the **Voting Rights Act**, saying that **race and ethnicity can be considered when drawing lines** but cannot unjustifiably predominate. Martinez discussed legal precedents and factors that enter into **determining whether voting rights are violated**, including concentrations of minority voters, racial voting patterns, and history of discriminatory voting practices or procedures. She added that race and ethnicity cannot be used to dilute minority community voting power by "cracking" (dividing into multiple districts) or "packing" (over-concentrating) minority voters.

Gaskins discussed **two ways to view competitiveness in redistricting**. In areas where neither major party has a strong majority, districts can be drawn to **encourage competition between the parties**. But competitiveness is also undermined when a district is drawn to

exclude a competitor, to the benefit of a specific candidate. This happens even within districts that are safely held by one party.

Gaskins also noted that a **gerrymandered district is not obvious from its appearance.** Districts drawn to achieve political goals can be regularly shaped and ones drawn to account for community interests can be oddly shaped. To effectively evaluate the district, it is necessary to understand the reasons for its design.

Both presenters emphasized that Michigan only gets one chance at redistricting every ten years and unless citizens work to influence the process now, they will not have another chance for 10 years. Gaskins encouraged people to testify, prepare or critique maps, and otherwise get involved, saying that **citizen efforts can become part of the record in legal challenges** to the maps that pass the Legislature.

Kurt Metzger, Director of Data Driven Detroit, presented Michigan's population trends and what to expect when the 2010 Census data are released. Michigan was the **only state in the nation to lose population** between 2000 and 2010. Changing migration patterns were a big factor, as 540,000 more people left the State than moved in. Michigan had a **net population loss to every state** in the nation except Maine.

Metzger noted that **Wayne County led all counties nationally in population loss,** which occurred **primarily in Detroit** but in other areas as well. More than half of the State's counties lost population over the decade. Among those that grew, **Macomb, Kent, and Livingston counties experienced the highest growth rates.**

Hispanic and Asian American populations grew at the fastest rates statewide. **The African American population remained steady in numbers but has relocated,** particularly from Detroit into southern Oakland and Macomb counties, as well as throughout Wayne County.

In relation to redistricting, Metzger said that the State lost a Congressional seat and the **13th and 14th Congressional districts (Detroit) will have to cover much larger areas.** Wayne County districts will also have to expand.

Metzger also noted that the **2010 Census will not provide income, education, and other socio-economic data.** These data will only be available from the American Community Survey, which is less accurate for small populations.

Dr. Michael McDonald, Associate Professor at George Mason University, talked about mapping criteria and how **presumably neutral criteria have political consequences.** Since voting precincts are contained within Census blocks and places, election data can be used to assess the political outcomes of different approaches to drawing the maps. McDonald's analysis found that in 2001, Michigan's Congressional districts were heavily biased and the state districts were modestly biased, both towards Republicans. The redistricting criteria used by the Michigan Legislature, **the Apol Standards, prioritize creating districts within**

county boundaries and this criterion results in a bias towards Republican districts. If the priority had been on preserving Census places, a slight bias towards Democratic districts would have occurred, since Democrats are more concentrated in cities.

McDonald stressed the importance of access to data and mapping software, saying that **control of the data is one of the ways that redistricting authorities limit public access** to the redistricting process. **In 2001, Michigan was the least transparent, in terms of its use of data and software.** The political parties, rather than State government, built the redistricting database.

McDonald and some of his colleagues have developed **free redistricting mapping software, which will be used for a redistricting competition in Michigan.** A similar competition was held recently in Virginia, to bring a public spotlight to redistricting and produce alternative maps. McDonald encouraged people to let legislators know which criteria will best represent their interests, but also predicted that Michigan's process will be a repeat of 2001.

Additional information on redistricting can be found on the [Michigan Redistricting Collaborative's website](#).

Michigan House Schedules Committee Hearings on Redistricting

Committee Chair Pete Lund (R-36) has announced plans to hold four hearings in the House Redistricting and Elections Committee prior to beginning work on redistricting maps. The Committee held the first in the series on April 12th, which focused on Michigan's 2010 Census results, presented by State Demographer Ken Darga. Darga's presentation can be viewed at <http://www.house.mi.gov/SessionDocs/2011-2012/Testimony/Committee7-4-12-2011.pdf>.

Testimony on the US Voting Rights Act is expected to be heard on April 26th and state redistricting law at a future hearing. The Committee's regular meeting time is Tuesday at 10 am. The redistricting hearings are expected to be televised by MGTV.

Training for Testifying on Redistricting - Friday, April 22, 11 a.m.

The Michigan Redistricting Collaborative is holding a webinar this Friday to help organizations and members of the public prepare to tell the story of their community at county or state redistricting hearings. Presenter: Christina Kuo of Common Cause. To

register, send an email to erinskenep Pratt@gmail.com

Community Conversations on Redistricting in May

Why does redistricting matter and could it be done differently? The Michigan Redistricting Collaborative is sponsoring a series of Community Conversations in May for people to learn about how legislative district boundaries are chosen and provide input on potential reforms to the current process. Facilitated by the Center for Michigan, which uses a “clicker” voting system to allow participants to indicate their opinions and compare them to the group.

Lansing, May 10th, 2:00 – 3:15 pm

Radisson Hotel, 111 North Grand Ave.

Host: Michigan Nonprofit Association

Grand Rapids, May 19th, 6:00 – 8:30 pm (includes “Gerrymandering” viewing)

Grand Valley State Univ. Loosemoore Auditorium, 401 W. Fulton St.

Host: The White House Project

Traverse City, May 21st, 1:30 – 3:00 pm

Park Place Hotel, 300 E. State St.

Host: League of Women Voters of MI

Register at <http://fs16.formsite.com/lwvmi/CommunityConversations/index.html> or call [517-484-5383](tel:517-484-5383). For additional info about the Lansing and Grand Rapids events, email erinskenep Pratt@gmail.com. For the Traverse City event, email redistricting@lwvmi.org.

Local League Redistricting Events

East Lansing, May 11th, 7:00 – 8:30 pm

Close Up On Michigan Redistricting

East Lansing Public Library 950 Abbott Rd., East Lansing

Sponsored by Lansing Area LWV

Kalamazoo, May 25th, 7:00 pm

“Gerrymandering” film viewing and discussion

Kalamazoo Public Library 315 S. Rose St., Kalamazoo

Sponsored by Kalamazoo Area LWV

Ann Arbor, June 16th, 7:00 – 8:30 pm

Redistricting at the City, County, and State Levels

Ann Arbor District Library, Downtown Branch

343 South Fifth Ave., Ann Arbor
Sponsored by Ann Arbor Area LWV

Michigan Voter Power (MVP) is a project of the League of Women Voters of Michigan. MVP works with other organizations to promote citizen participation and increase transparency in government.

Michigan Voter Power

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