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To Senate Election Law and Municipal Affairs Committee

From Liz Tentarelli, president, League of Women Voters NH
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Re **HB52 congressional redistricting plan**

As a non-partisan organization, League of Women Voters is appalled by the blatant attempt to make District 1 Republican by gerrymandering. We began to take notice last January 23, when Republican Party Chair Stephen Stepanik said publicly, referring to their majority in the Legislature, "Because of this [Republican majority] we control redistricting. I can stand here today and guarantee you that we will send a conservative Republican to Washington DC as a congressperson in 2022." Yikes!

At the November 4 redistricting committee meeting, Rep. Robert Lynn, R-Windham, a former Supreme Court chief justice who should know better, said, "Were political considerations something that were in the mix? Of course they were. This is a political process as the Supreme Court has said repeatedly, both the New Hampshire Supreme Court and the U.S. Supreme Court." Political yes, but partisan? It should not be.

When political advantage leads to partisan districting, court cases follow. This is why League of Women Voters and others have been arguing for an independent redistricting commission for 20 years. After Rep. Lynn's statement, even some of the Republicans looked uncomfortable. A few attempted to justify the major shift in towns, but made little sense. No one could see how "keeping the southern tier together" was in operation. The presenter, Rep. Ross Berry, had claimed the plan as his own and then disavowed it.

Now you, the Senate Election Law Committee, have the power to set this right. You can reject HB 52 as approved by the House and instead amend it to make both CD1 and CD2 more competitive. Those districts have swung back and forth between the parties numerous times; they can do so again, letting the voters in each district determine the outcomes of the general elections.

If senators have another redistricting plan to propose, I hope they make it public. If the senate would consider a carefully drawn and amended plan coming from a non-partisan source, all the better. The Mapathon Project plan moves only 12 towns/wards from one district to another, keeps 9 of our 10 counties intact in their respective CDs, keeps 94% of SAUs intact, and makes both districts more competitive. It has the added advantage of being much closer to the way our CDs have been drawn for the past 140 years.

Redistricting maps need to pass the Governor's "smell test." HB52 as passed by the House does not. Please amend it so that all NH voters can have confidence that the winner of the congressional race is determined not in the party primary but in a competitive general election. Please amend HB52 to be the best competitive map it can be!