On proposed Local Law No. “O” for 2018: For the Purpose of Amending Section 207 of the Albany County Charter, Creating an Albany County Commission on Redistricting

Patricia Sibilia, President and Observer Corps Chair
League of Women Voters of Albany County

The League of Women Voters of Albany County has formally joined with other organizations and individuals to form the One Person, One Vote Coalition. The Press Release announcing that coalition is attached to this testimony. The coalition not only has a keen interest in redistricting, but will be playing an active role in the 2020 census process.

Subsequent to the last public hearing on Local Law O, the coalition outlined a set of proposed edits to the drafted legislation to address the concerns we had with it. We applaud the sponsors for considering our proposed changes and for adopting a large part of them.

Our recommendation to have the word “redistricting” replace the word “reapportionment” throughout the legislation to more accurately represent the process was accepted.

We are happy to see that our suggestion to include the “one person, one vote” language has been included.

We are glad that our concerns were addressed about the legislation being silent on a fall-back process should the County Executive not approve the proposed local law, as well as adding back the exclusion of lobbyists from the potential commission pool.

For increased transparency in the process, we proposed the addition of language to ensure significant interactions be added to the official records and available to the public on the designated Albany County webpage. We are very pleased to see these changes now reflected in the interaction between the MMD Subcommittee and the Commission, when the Commission submits it report to the Legislature, and also between the County Legislature and the the County Executive if vetoed.

However, in Section L.2, we also suggested if the proposed maps were not adopted, to have the Legislature’s feedback to the Commission be included as part of the official public record. This is not included in the current version and we’d like to see this be in the final legislation for complete transparency.

The League previously mentioned that we wanted to see party registration, voting history and participation excluded from the entire process. While wording was added to remove it
completely from the mapping process, the current language allows it to be used to test the maps. There is no need to test the maps with political data to ensure they comply with redistricting standards. Political data should not be used in any part of this process and we would like to see this stricken.

Lastly, we had proposed that the 4 appointed commissioners unanimously agree when selecting the additional 5 members. This is so all commissioners have equal influence in the selection process and to ensure balance in the final makeup of the commission. We cannot see any argument as to why this should not be included. In previously shared Ulster County legislation, they included language that safeguards against the situation where the appointed commissioners would fail to select the additional members - something no one wants to see happen, but they added language as a preventative. Should this situation occur, they address this by the drawing of names by the County Clerk from a receptacle that contains all names of potential commissioners.

The League of Women Voters of Albany County believes that equitable redistricting is critical to democracy. We appreciate the hard work done over the last several years and that it has been a bipartisan sponsorship and discussion. We are grateful to have our concerns be heard and to have been addressed in large part. The League will always push to try to get the most strongest and fairest legislation possible. We want Albany County to be proud to pass a law that stands up to the test of time and to be in the best interest of all residents.

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