



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF FLORIDA

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LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF FLORIDA REFUTES LEGISLATURE'S DEFENSE OF CASE AGAINST FAIR DISTRICTS, CRITICIZES REDISTRICTING PROCESS

Tallahassee, FL -- In the second round of the Florida Legislature's redistricting "listening tour" being held throughout the state this summer, the League of Women Voters of Florida exposed a jarring misrepresentation by legislators regarding their decision to spend public money to fight new redistricting standards.

During a redistricting public hearing in Gainesville on July 13, the League refuted claims by legislators that the House of Representatives, in joining the legal case against Amendment 6 filed by U.S. Reps. Corrine Brown (FL-3) and Mario Diaz-Balart (FL-25), only seeks to "clarify" how the amendment interacts with the federal Voting Rights Act. The complaint filed by GrayRobinson, the former law firm of House Speaker Dean Cannon, on behalf of the House does not mention a request for clarification and instead challenges the constitutionality of Amendment 6 in order to invalidate it.

"Misrepresentation of the House's purpose in this lawsuit gives the League grave concern and should be of the same concern to every Florida citizen," Florida League president Deirdre Macnab said. "It is time for this committee and the Legislature to come clean: drop the lawsuit, stop spending taxpayer dollars and follow the law of the land."

Legislators were responding to continued criticism during the hearings about their willingness to spend taxpayer money to overturn the will of 63% of voters, who approved Fair Districts Amendments 5 and 6 in November. The case against Amendment 6 is being defended by Secretary of State Kurt Browning, which amounts to Florida taxpayers paying for both sides of the same case.

"The Legislature should be working to uphold the Constitution, not spending our money to protect their own interests at the expense of the provision placed there by almost two-thirds of the electorate last November," said Pam Goodman, Fair Districts Chair for the League. "If the Legislature would stop trying to get out of following the new Fair Districts standards and apply them as the voters intended, there would be no need for litigation and no need for the massive amounts of taxpayer money they are planning to spend."

Supervisors of Elections in many counties have said that speeding up the timeline for redistricting set by the Legislature will help them ensure efficient and fair elections. Under the present timeline, the League believes it is highly unlikely that districts will be finally approved before candidates must sign up to run for election. In addition, it is unlikely that ballots will be finalized by the deadline for sending absentee and overseas ballots. Districts may not be finalized until August 2012, which would mean Florida's maps would be approved later than almost every other state in the nation.^[1]

According to House lawyer Miguel DeGrandy, the current timeline will cause "massive voter confusion."^[2] Voting officials will not have time to prepare for the elections. Challengers or new candidates will have limited time to mount campaigns, and voters will be voting for candidates they have had little opportunity to get to know.

Despite continued requests, the Legislature has not provided any newly drawn district maps for public comment. Other states that have public hearings do so in order to allow citizens the opportunity to comment on actual proposed maps. For example, after maps are finalized in Arizona, they are made available to the public for comment for 30 days before final passage.

In Florida, on the other hand, Redistricting Committee Chair Don Gaetz has said citizens will have only a two- or three-day comment period before any votes are taken on a proposal.

"It is no wonder that the vast majority of citizens who have been attending these hearings have expressed suspicion about the true motives of the legislators," Macnab said. "We remain concerned that citizens will have minimal time to give substantive comment on the real maps being proposed by the Legislature."

^[1] Many states including Alabama, Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada and Oklahoma have already completed or almost completed redistricting.

^[2] Bradenton Herald, April 20, 2011

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The League of Women Voters of Florida, a nonpartisan 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. For more information about the League, visit www.TheFloridaVoter.org.