



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF PENNSYLVANIA
226 Forster Street, Harrisburg, PA 17102-3220
717.234.1576

Making Democracy Work®
Grassroots leadership since 1920

Testimony of the League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania
to the
Senate of Pennsylvania State Government Committee
on
Electoral College Reform
October 4, 2011

Good afternoon. I am Lora Lavin, Representative Government Coordinator of the League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania for whom I am speaking today.

Our system for electing the President is undemocratic. It gives voters in populous states, like Pennsylvania, extra clout in determining which candidate wins election to our nation's highest office. As a "swing state," where the statewide popular vote could go either way, every vote in every county across Pennsylvania is important in determining which candidate gets our Electoral College votes. In states like New York or Texas, where the statewide vote is consistently Democratic or Republican, the only votes that count are those cast for the majority party candidate. Votes for the minority party candidate do not influence the awarding of the state's electoral votes. For these reasons, candidates concentrate their money and get out the vote efforts in swing states.

Two proposals to reform the Electoral College are under consideration. One would proportionally allocate electoral votes to reflect the popular vote in each state. The other would award all but two of a state's electoral votes to the winner of the popular vote in each congressional district. Both of these reforms would be worse than the current system.

Proportional representation would increase the probability that no candidate would receive a majority of the Electoral College. As a result, it would send the election of the President to the House of Representatives where each state, regardless of population would receive only one vote. This is even more contrary to the one-person-one-vote principle than the Electoral College system.

Under the proposed Congressional District Method, the winner of the statewide popular vote would get only two of a state's electoral votes. The remainder would be allocated according to the popular vote in each of the state's congressional districts. The winner of the statewide popular vote gets the two votes representing the state's two U.S. senators. While this would seem to be fairer than winner-take-all, in reality, it would mirror the unfairness of the Electoral College. Candidates would concentrate their campaigns in swing districts. Minority voters in safe districts would only influence the awarding of the two statewide electoral votes. Furthermore,

this system would raise the stakes in how congressional district boundaries are redrawn and invite further manipulation through the unfair process of gerrymandering.

The League believes that in any election each vote should count equally. We do not support reform of the Electoral College on a state-by-state basis. We believe there should be uniformity across the nation in the systems used to elect the President. Instead, the League supports eliminating the Electoral College and electing the president by direct popular vote. Under the current system, candidates tailor their messages to maximize their appeal in a limited number of states. Under direct popular vote, every vote in every state would be equally important. Candidates would have to campaign nationwide and appeal to a broader and more diverse population.

Past attempts to get Congress to propose the necessary Constitutional amendment for ratification by the states have failed. An alternative is the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact. States that join the Compact pledge to award their electoral votes to the overall winner of the national popular vote regardless of who won the popular vote in their state. To date, enough states have joined the compact to make up 49 percent of the 270 votes needed for the compact to take effect. Polls show voters nationwide overwhelmingly support electing the president by national popular vote including 70 percent of Pennsylvania voters. Rep. Tom Creighton, a Republican, and Rep. Mark Cohen, Democrat have cosponsored HB 1270 authorizing Pennsylvania to join the Compact. Pennsylvania's legislature has the power to pass this bill and help make our presidential election system truly fair.

On behalf of the League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania, I thank you for the opportunity to provide input in this area of critical importance to our membership and to voters throughout the Commonwealth.