



June 1, 2019

To: City of Martinez City Council

Re: Consideration of Ordinance Establishing an Independent Redistricting Commission in Martinez

The League supports measures that will protect every citizen's right to vote and that will ensure government's responsibility to protect this right through regulations and procedures that encourage an informed and active electorate.

We note that the City of Martinez is currently engaged in legal action related to concerns about the structure of its current voting districts and that the Contra Costa Superior Court has raised concerns about the city's compliance with elements of the California Voting Rights Act.

The league believes that it is important to identify, preserve and protect "communities of interest". These "communities of interest" are essential in building community engagement and mobilizing voters to participate in local governance. They begin to share in the understanding that their local participation makes a constructive difference in the results of their community activism. "Communities of interest" should include considerations of topography and geography to ensure districts are compact and contiguous to ensure neighborhoods are fairly represented and should also maintain a balance of ethnic or linguistic minorities, and consider public feeder schools within a school district, local business centers, churches and their religious communities, employment centers, parks and recreation areas, etc.

**The League of Women Voters continues to support an independent special commission as the preferred redistricting body** with membership that includes citizens at large, representatives of public interest groups, and experienced community leaders. Having an independent special commission charged with drawing voting districts is considered a best practice and is currently the practice in California for drawing U.S. Congressional districts, State legislative districts, and with expected passage of SB 139 and AB 849, will likely soon be how County supervisorial districts will be drawn in the State. Many municipalities throughout the State have also adopted independent commissions.

We understand that a group of Martinez citizens has formed a grassroots group known as *Martinez Residents for an Independent Redistricting Commission*. In collaboration with California Common Cause this group has developed a proposed ordinance for the establishment of such a commission. We want to voice our support for this effort and strongly recommend that the city council move forward in considering this proposal.

To ensure that an independent redistricting commission is able to develop districts for the city in a fair manner, we believe that several core principles should form the basis for its establishment. First, it should be established by ordinance in the city's municipal code and should have sole authority to adopt new district maps. Secondly, the ordinance should contain provisions to ensure that the commission is independent of political control and that commissioners are unbiased and not directly appointed by elected officials. The redistricting commission should reflect Martinez's diverse neighborhoods. It should be charged with drawing boundaries using fair redistricting criteria that promote representative districts which keep neighborhoods and communities of interest intact. Finally, it should conduct all of its business in public and actively seek out public participation in the redistricting process.

Regards,

*Dorcas Regua*  
President, LWV DV