November 12, 2019

Dear Members of the New York State Legislature,

We write to remind you of the upcoming deadline for the appointment of members to New York State’s first Independent Redistricting Commission under the new redistricting process approved by voters in 2014. Article III, Section 5-b of the New York State Constitution states that “on or before February first of each year ending with a zero...an independent redistricting commission shall be established to determine the district lines for congressional and state legislative offices.”

The constitution calls for the formation of a ten-member commission, eight of whom are appointed by the Senate and Assembly legislative leaders.¹ Commissioners cannot within the last three years:

- Be or have been a member of the NYS legislature or US Congress, or a state-wide official;
- Be or have been a state officer or employee or legislative employee;
- Be or have been a registered lobbyist in New York State;
- Be or have been a political party chairman; or
- Be the spouse of a statewide elected official or of any member of the US Congress or state legislature.

The constitution sets forth a strict calendar of administrative actions the commission must take leading up to the release of their proposed legislative maps in September of 2021. The League of Women Voters of New York State believes that in order for this commission to fulfill its constitutional obligations, it must receive adequate funding from the state in the 2020-2021 fiscal budget year.

Without timely appointments and adequate state funding, the Independent Redistricting Commission will experience the same dysfunction as the recent New York State Complete Count Commission. This commission was formed nearly a year later than anticipated, and vastly underfunded and understaffed. The resulting report was lacking in substance and direction on how to distribute the $20 million in funding to help reach hard to count area that has yet to be distributed.

The League and its grassroots members will be working to ensure that the Independent Redistricting Commission is a truly independent body with enough funding from the state to fulfill its constitutional duties. Included in this letter is an outline of constitutionally mandated appointment procedures, criteria for the drafting legislative districts, and a calendar of commission and legislative deadlines that we hope all legislators will review ahead of the 2020 session.

Sincerely,

Suzanne Stassevitch, President
League of Women Voters, New York State

¹ The 8 Commissioners appointed by the legislative leaders appoint the remaining 2 members.