Testimony on Redistricting
Sue Smith, League of Women Voters of Michigan
House Committee on Redistricting and Elections
June 28, 2011

On behalf the Michigan Redistricting Collaborative, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Sue Smith and I am the President of the League of Women Voters of Michigan and a member of the Michigan Redistricting Collaborative.

On behalf of the more than 40 organizational members of the Collabortative, I want to continue to voice our concern about the lack of transparency in this redistricting process.

Let me be clear. We are not asking for you to wait until November 1. We are simply asking for 30 days so that the proposed plans may be analyzed and meaningful dialogue can occur. The proposed plans have not been provided to the public in a format that is easily analyzed or understood.

As part of the Michigan Redistricting Collaborative, the Center for Michigan recently conducted community conversations to inform Michigan citizens about redistricting, hear their views on it, and discuss how they can get involved in the process. Community conversations took place in Detroit, Grand Rapids, Lansing, Livonia and Traverse City. More than 200 people voiced their opinions on the redistricting process by voting on questions posed to the group.

When asked about their priorities for how legislative districts are drawn, 88% said that transparency is very important to them. Another question asked participants what process would be best, only 3% said the current process is best, compared to 34% that indicated support for a new legislative system with more transparency, public hearings, clear map rationale and 63% that said they would prefer a non-partisan redistricting commission independent of legislature.

With public support for transparency, we encourage you to build on your action to date by:

- Posting redistricting plans (including data behind maps) to be available on the Legislature's web site for 30 days before passage.
- Holding at least two committee meetings (in each chamber) to receive testimony about the plan.
- Holding at least four public hearings around the state to allow direct comment by the public.
- Providing a statement for each district explaining how the boundaries were drawn and how the district has been changed.

Our request is simple. We are asking for meaningful dialogue on an issue that will impact communities for the next ten years. However, for meaningful dialogue to occur, the public must be given the opportunity to provide feedback on the legislature's redistricting plans. We are asking you not to rush this process.

Considering the significant impact of these plans, there is no need to rush a process that happens only once every ten years.