

Detroit Free Press

League of Women Voters rolls out redistricting forums across state

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The League of Women Voters of Michigan announced Friday that it is holding town hall meetings across the state to discuss with voters how to change the way Michigan draws its legislative and congressional districts.

The League says the town halls are an educational effort, where its leaders can discuss alternatives used in other states and explore ideas voters have for how to draw the state's districts.

"We are allowing politicians to pick their voters rather than voters pick their representatives," said Sue Smith the league's vice president for redistricting.

In Michigan, after every census, legislators redraw the state's congressional and legislative district boundaries, which are subject to veto by the governor.

"Michigan voters need to know there are alternative ways to draw the map," Smith said. "It doesn't need to be done this way."

For alternatives, Smith said some states have non-partisan advisory committees that advise the legislature on drawing districts. In Arizona, voters, through a constitutional amendment, opted for an independent commission to draw district lines. Legislatures there sued saying the move was unconstitutional. The U.S. Supreme Court in June upheld the commission's constitutionality and endorsed the independent commission.

"The people of Arizona turned to the initiative to curb the practice of gerrymandering and, thereby, to ensure that Members of Congress would have 'an habitual recollection of their dependence on the people,' wrote Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, citing The Federalist Papers in the majority opinion.

In 2012, Smith said, the league endorsed the idea of an independent commission drawing districts. But, Smith said, the town halls are not intended to push any one idea, but to discuss multiple alternatives, and ultimately, "help people connect the dots between the anger and frustration they feel and the clear problem."

Democrats have introduced legislation to create a redistricting commission, but that is likely to go nowhere in the GOP-controlled Legislature.

The League of Women Voters of Michigan is planning the following events:

5:30 p.m., Wednesday, Traverse Area District Library, 610 Woodmere Ave., Traverse City.

6:30 p.m., Thursday, Berrien County Regional Education Service Agency, 711 St. Joseph Ave., Berrien Springs.

6:30 p.m., Thursday, Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church, 5631 N. Adams Road, Bloomfield Hills.

6 p.m., Tues. Sept. 29, Western International High School, 1500 Scotten, Detroit

11:45 a.m., Fri. Oct 2, Midland County Senior Services, Trailside Center, 4700 Dublin Ave., Midland.

7 p.m., Thurs. Oct. 15, Manistee High School 525 12th St., Manistee.

7 p.m., Thurs. Oct. 15, Clinton-Macomb Library South Branch, 35679 South Gratiot, Clinton Twp.

7 p.m., Tuesday. Oct. 20, Veterans Memorial Library Annex, 301 S. University, Mt. Pleasant.

7 p.m., Wed. Oct. 21, Henry Ford Centennial Library, 16301 Michigan Ave., Dearborn.

7 p.m., Wed. Oct. 21, Livonia Civic Center Library Auditorium, 32777 Five Mile Road, Livonia.

7 p.m., Wed. Oct. 21, Grosse Pointe War Memorial, 32 Lake Shore Drive, Grosse Pointe Farms.

7 p.m., Thurs. Oct. 22, Clinton-Macomb Library North Branch, 16800 24 Mile Road, Macomb Twp.

7 p.m., Thurs. Oct. 22, Birmingham Unitarian Church, 38651 Woodward Ave., Bloomfield Hills.

7 p.m., Mon. Oct. 26, Holland City Hall, 270 S. River Ave., Holland.

7 p.m., Wed. Oct. 28, Delta District Library, 5130 Davenport Drive, Lansing.

10 a.m., Thurs. Oct. 29, Fox Run Retirement Community, 41000 Thirteen Mile Road, Novi.

7 p.m., Thurs. Oct. 29, Ann Arbor District Library, 343 South Fifth St., Ann Arbor.

7:30 p.m., Tues. Nov. 3, West Bloomfield Township Public Library, 4600 Walnut Lake Road, West Bloomfield.

7 p.m., Thurs. Nov. 5, Clinton-Macomb Public Library, Main Branch, 40900 Romeo-Plank Road, Clinton Twp.

7 p.m., Tues. Nov. 10, Mott Community College Regional Technology Center, 1401 E. Court St., Flint.

7 p.m., Tues. Nov. 10, Hannah Community Center, 819 Abbott Road, East Lansing.

7 p.m., Mon. Nov. 16, Alpena County George, N. Fletcher Public Library, 211 N. First Ave., Alpena.