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Michigan's closed-door political redistricting process fails – again

Michigan Redistricting Collaborative calls on Legislature to reform the process in time for 2021

LANSING – Gov. Rick Snyder signed a new redistricting plan into law on Tuesday, but the results are the same old story – a broken process conducted behind closed doors has once again lead to the fracturing of communities of interest, less competitive and more partisan districts and increased citizen cynicism.

Members of the Michigan Redistricting Collaborative (MRC), a collection of nonprofit organizations dedicated to improving redistricting in the state, are calling on the Michigan Legislature to begin reforming redistricting now – in hopes that the next redistricting process in 2021 will be more open and transparent and less dedicated to partisan warfare.

“The old way isn’t working – if that wasn’t apparent before, it certainly is now,” said **Kyle Caldwell**, President and CEO of the Michigan Nonprofit Association. “We need our political leaders to take advantage of this important moment and find a new way – a way that requires the input and involvement of Michigan citizens. The people should be picking their candidates – right now, it’s the other way around.” Caldwell also noted that lawmakers can take advantage of term limits and make positive change. “Lawmakers could change this broken system without harm to their interests while doing the right thing for the interests of voters.”

The MRC pointed to new congressional districts spiraling in Oakland County as an illustration of political gerrymandering. Farmington is pulled away from Farmington Hills and West Bloomfield, Bloomfield Township and Bloomfield Hills are in three different districts. The serpentine-shaped 14th Congressional District runs from southwest Detroit to Pontiac in a narrow chain of communities of greatly differing interests and needs.

“This map fractures communities throughout Southeast Michigan for no better reason than partisan gain,” said **Rich Robinson**, executive director of the Michigan Campaign Finance Network.

Pointing to the breakup of the Grosse Pointe communities in the new State House districts as another example of poorly conceived map drawing, Robinson said, “Politicians are needlessly splintering representation of communities in order to assert partisan advantage. A new, non-partisan approach is absolutely vital.”

The MRC supports legislation that would, for congressional and state legislative redistricting, require:

- a. Redistricting plans to be available on the Legislature’s web site for 30 days before passage.
- b. That each chamber be required to hold at least two committee meetings to receive testimony about the plan.
- c. That the Legislature hold at least four public hearings around the state to allow direct comment by the public.
- d. That the Legislature provides a statement for each district explaining how the boundaries were drawn and how the district has been changed.

“Lawmakers should focus on making Michigan a better state – not on their political futures,” said **Christina Kuo**, executive director of Common Cause Michigan. “We need to put the reigns of redistricting where they belong – in the hands of the people.”

Members of the Michigan Redistricting Collaborative include the Michigan Nonprofit Association, The Center for Michigan, League of Women Voters of Michigan, Jackson County Chamber of Commerce, Common Cause Michigan, Michigan Campaign Finance Network and many others. For more information on the collaborative, visit www.drawthelinemichigan.org.