

Testimony of David F. Fisher, Clean Elections Minnesota

MN Senate Elections Committee 03.12.2024

Chair Carlson, members, I'm David Fisher. I teach at the University of Minnesota Law School and am a former Minnesota Commissioner and Metropolitan Council member. And, an election judge.

I represent Clean Elections MN, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization working for inclusive and healthy democracy. We urge your support for SF4785. At the same time, we have not taken a position on either a year-round legislature or the bundling of constitutional amendments into one initiative.

We do strongly support reasonable limits on the ability of legislators to lobby their former colleagues after they have left office. And, we strongly support creation of an Independent Redistricting Commission. In short, we support integrity in our election process and results.

Elections should be decided by voters, not by the very politicians competing for the support of those same voters. Every voice should be heard and every vote should be counted equally.

But in many states, politicians draw their own district lines in order to pick their own voters and protect themselves on reelection.

Well the trend is changing. Today more than 21 U.S. states have some form of non-partisan or bipartisan redistricting commission, and although some have had their hiccups the reforms still work better than when maps were drawn in secret, behind closed doors.

In July 2018 the Brennan Center for Justice released research into redistricting commissions after interviews of more than 100 stakeholders involved with redistricting in seven jurisdictions. What they found was “a compelling case that putting commissions in charge of redistricting can significantly reduce many of the worst abuses associated with redistricting and improve outcomes and satisfaction across the stakeholder spectrum — but only if commissions are carefully designed and structured to promote independence and incentivize discussion and compromise.”

Based on its research, the Brennan Center recommended that reforms to maximize their independence and effectiveness:

- An independent selection process coupled with an element of randomness.
- Clear criteria for map drawing.
- A commission of nine to 15 members to ensure diversity and guard against deadlock.
- Map-approval rules that require at least some support from each major political block.
- Strong transparency requirements that make commission proceedings accessible and assessable.
- An enforceable guarantee of adequate funding for its operations.
- A timeframe allowing time to hold public hearings, obtain feedback, make necessary adjustments, and draw final maps.

SF 4785 addresses each of these reforms and again urge your support.

We also join the League of Women Voters in hoping that a single Bill can come together quickly that reflects best practices and lessons learned from across the country and can be supported by all stakeholders, especially those of impacted or marginalized communities.