

## THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS & GREAT SCHOOLS IN WAKE

### What is redistricting? Why should it matter to you?

Our elected local, state, and federal representatives enact laws that affect every aspect of society. They have a big impact on our income, safety, education, roads, housing, the food we eat, the air we breathe and the many services we use.

Most representatives are elected from districts – from local school board districts to national Congressional districts – **and the way that people are grouped into districts has a big influence on who can get elected and what values they promote.** For example, a rural district will likely elect a representative who will fight for farmers’ interests. A representative from a big city will likely have different priorities. The same is true for districts with large concentrations of people of the same race or the same political party affiliation.

Regrouping people and redrawing these district lines is called *redistricting*. The Constitution mandates redistricting after each Census to adjust districts and make them roughly equal in population size. The way the lines of a particular district are redrawn to include or exclude certain kinds of people will directly affect who can win the next election. **The way districts are redrawn can affect who is elected to a school board**, city council, state or national legislature.

That’s why redistricting is so important – it directly affects who wins elections and who adopts the policies that govern our lives.

The redistricting process should be **open and transparent to allow people in the districts** to be input into the decisions about how to fairly allocate residents across the various districts. An involved public not only understand the process better but they can also make meaningful contributions to the overall results. In North Carolina, while elected representatives are authorized to redraw the lines for their own governmental body, it has been shown that involving the public leads to greater public support and increases voting. Maps drawn by our elected officials can be challenged in court if the new map does not properly take into consideration key factors, including: making the district relatively compact, not dividing up communities with closely similar interests, and not violating the Voting Rights Act’s protection of minority voters.

Individuals and community groups can also learn how to use these various factors to draw their *own map* with district lines that could eventually be viewed by a court or the US Justice Department as more fair than the one drawn by the political representatives and their “experts.”

**Citizens who want to shape the political future of their community can have a powerful influence on the redistricting process.**



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