January 27, 2020

Report from Carol Kuniholm, Fair Districts PA Chair

As we move toward Census 2020 and the next redistricting, we are doubling our efforts to see an independent commission in place for both congressional and state legislative maps before the 2021 deadline.

Is it a steep climb? Very. We knew that when we started.

Is it possible? Yes. We’ve come farther than we expected, grown faster than anyone would have thought possible, and have the attention – and respect - of legislators in both houses.

That growth is in very large part thanks to you – our endorsing organizations. The League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania, as fiscal sponsor and founding member, has been invaluable in providing a ready-made chapter-based network already active across the state. Local NAACP, AAUW and UUPLAN groups have collaborated in wonderful ways to host events and bolster visibility for our local outreach. More geographically-based organizations like B-PEP, PUMP and POWER have helped with targeted outreach in specific demographics. And the deep knowledge and expertise of founding organizations like Common Cause PA, Community of Seventy and the Public Interest Law Center have grounded us and given us a far wider reach of expertise than would have otherwise been possible.

The coalition now includes forty organizations, over forty local groups and very active state-wide working groups providing professional-level communications, advocacy, research, and data-management support. With your help, our more than 5500 volunteers have logged over 840 public informational meetings, 350 resolutions in support of an independent commission and have reported back on over 400 productive in-person meetings with legislators and their staff.

You may have seen that we’ve passed 100,000 petition signers. That number catches attention from legislators and press. That’s thanks to your help and to thousands of volunteers collecting signatures at events you co-hosted or at polls across the state.

You may also have seen that the House bills we support are among the most co-sponsored in this session, as HB 722 was in the last. HB 23 has most co-sponsors of any, with 95, and HB 22 is tied for 2nd, with 93. The same bills will be introduced in the Senate very soon – SB 1022 by Senator Lisa Boscola and SB 1023 by Senator Tom Killion. We’ve had good conversations with leadership about giving the bills a vote, but as always in Harrisburg, no solid guarantees.

Despite all this growth, the next few months are crucial. While I have regular conversations with many of you, I’d like to invite you to a conference call on February 13 with other interested leaders of endorsing organizations. The goal will be to give a quick update on where things stand with legislation and outreach, answer your questions and invite your ideas for a continued push to get bills through both houses before the summer recess.
Are there immediate ways you can help? Of course!

1. If you haven’t recently invited your list to sign the petition, please do: https://tinyurl.com/signfdpa.

2. Check the sponsor list for HB 23 (HB 22 is almost identical) and see if there are non-sponsors where you have influence who might be encouraged to sign on.

3. Consider writing an op-ed expressing strong support for our two bills/one commission solution as an essential way to create a more accountable, responsive state legislature.

4. Invite one of our speakers to speak with your leadership team, a local chapter or an advocacy group. We have speakers ready to share basic background on gerrymandering, to provide updates on our supported bills, to offer training in team-based advocacy, or to provide a data-driven look into legislative dysfunction and the need to reform the rules in our PA General Assembly. All are easily available through our Speakers Bureau request form.

5. If you can, feel free to publicize our March 23 Rally to End Gerrymandering. We’ll have buses coming from all parts of the state. At our 2018 rally we packed the capital rotunda. Our goal is to have even more supporters show up on March 23. We’ll hear from prime sponsors of House and Senate bills plus a few organizational leaders. Expect lots of creative energy in signs, songs and chants.

I look forward to talking on February 11 about other ways we can work together to ensure fair maps, fair elections and a responsive state government.

CONFERENCE CALL: TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 4 PM.
CALL IN: 712-770-5505  CODE: 594190.

Or contact me to talk one-on-one any time.

Thank you!

Carol Kuniholm
Fair Districts PA Chair
484-678-8061