

Nonpartisan redistricting plan gaining support, proponents says

By **Bob Pieper For Chronicle Media** — November 9, 2015

Overwhelming voter approval of a nonpartisan redistricting plan in Ohio last week could bode well for a similar proposal in Illinois, supporters believe.

Under the proposed Illinois Independent Map Amendment, the boundaries of state senate and representative districts would be established every 10 years by a new, independent commission. Presently, the state legislature is in charge of determining the boundaries. Critics say that system has lead to gerrymandering.

The amendments would “create a system where the voters choose their representatives instead of the representatives choosing their voters,” according to the website of Support Independent Maps, the organization formed to back the measure

Supporters – including the Illinois League of Women Voters, Illinois Farm Bureau, Illinois Chamber of Commerce, and American Association of Retired Persons – are conducting an initiative petition drive to place the proposed amendment to the Illinois Constitution on the on the November 2016 election ballot.

Since May, they have collected more than two thirds of the 600,000 voter signatures needed by next spring to place the measure before voters, according to Cindi Canary, executive director of the petition drive.

“We’re encouraged by the strong support for redistricting reform in Ohio where more than 72 percent of voters backed non-partisan redistricting reform,” said Canary.

In Illinois the reform drive has been joined by a number of Democratic, Republican and Independent political figures, adds Cheryl Budzinski, president of the League of Women Voters of Greater Peoria

Under the proposed amendment, legislative districts would be established by a nonpartisan, 11-member Independent Redistricting Commission, made up of Illinois voters. The commission would be appointed by the Illinois Auditor General from a list of 100 applicants, compiled by a new three-member Applicant Review Panel.

Each potential commissioner would be reviewed by the panel for prior political experience, relevant analytical skills, ability to contribute to a fair redistricting process and ability to represent the demographic and geographic diversity of the state, according to the proposed amendment The panel would also review candidates for potential conflicts of interests. Demographic diversity would also be considered by the panel.

The three-member panel would be chosen at random by the auditor general from a pool of registered voters who have a “demonstrated understanding of, and adherence to, standards of ethical conduct,” according to the proposed amendment.

Any Illinois voter could apply to serve on the redistricting commission or the applicant review panel, proponents emphasize.

If approved by voters, the new redistricting system would take effect in 2021.

The proposed Illinois reforms would be somewhat broader than those approved last week in Ohio, where an existing redistricting panel was expanded and anti-gerrymandering provisions were added to state law.

Additional information on the proposed amendment can be found at www.mapamendment.org.