

Statement of James W. Conrad, Jr.
before the
Alexandria City Council
regarding the
City's Proposed Legislative Package
for the 2020 Virginia General Assembly Session,
Docket No. 20-0326
November 16, 2019

Mayor Wilson and members of Council, my name is Jamie Conrad. Our family has lived in the Rosemont neighborhood since 1985. I'm here this morning on behalf of OneVirginia2021, a non-partisan, nonprofit organization devoted to ending the practice of gerrymandering in Virginia. As our state has demonstrated only too well, gerrymandering is when legislatures manipulate electoral districts to protect incumbents, give the majority party a disproportionate share of seats, or suppress racial or other minorities.

Last year, I stood before you to express our strong support for the "Redistricting Reform" plank in the City's draft legislative package. Thanks to support from the City, and from citizens all across Virginia, the General Assembly in 2019 took

the historic, nationally unprecedented step of passing a constitutional amendment to establish a bipartisan commission of citizens and legislators to draw state and federal legislative districts. Under the Commonwealth's Constitution, the General Assembly must pass the exact same amendment in its upcoming session. The amendment can then go before the voters in a referendum on Election Day 2020, where it should pass by a wide margin. The new commission would then use the results of the 2020 census in 2021 to draw new districts – fair districts – for the next ten years.

OneVirginia2021 is pleased that the draft legislative package before you today – on page 12 – specifically endorses the amendment that passed earlier this year. We strongly urge you to retain this plank.

We also urge you to push the City's delegation to support the amendment again. While the amendment passed last time by overwhelming majorities in both houses, the passage of

time and the results of the election could potentially lead some legislators to wonder if they should vote the same way again. Our answer is emphatically yes. While we might have drafted the amendment somewhat differently in an ideal world, we firmly believe that the process this amendment establishes will prevent one party from dominating the other and will protect minority rights. It is vastly superior to the status quo. And the amendment requires implementing legislation. That legislation can provide additional criteria to govern the commission's work – for example, stating that the commission cannot favor or discriminate against any party.

Once again, to proceed to the voters, the amendment has to pass next year. And it has to pass verbatim — no changes are allowed. So it's make-or-break next year. We have greatly appreciated the City's past support of the amendment, and we will be grateful for your continued

support. We also commit once again to helping you in any way we can.

Thank you.

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