



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF WISCONSIN

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379 Words

To the Editor:

It was with great disappointment yesterday that League of Women Voters of Wisconsin withdrew our support for the current ethics reform proposal.

Last week, the League testified at the senate and assembly public hearings, strongly supporting the goal of creating a single state agency responsible for ethics and elections, with the ability to enforce the law in these areas. We believed that, with some work, this bill had great potential. It has become clear, however, that serious flaws make this bill has unacceptable despite multiple redrafts.

The League has three main concerns with the ethics reform proposal:

1. The venue provision of the bill, which deals with where legislators and officials charged with ethics violations are to be tried, is potentially unconstitutional. This measure would allow accusations against lawmakers to be prosecuted in their home counties instead of in the county where the crime allegedly occurred. Lawmakers should be treated like other citizens and be accountable in the county in which they are accused of committing a crime. Our electoral system provides the opportunity for their constituents in their home county to “try” them again at the next election.
2. The non-severability clause is unworkable and should be removed. The non-severability clause would make the entire bill unconstitutional if any part of it is ruled unconstitutional. While we appreciate the amendment that would avoid a regulatory void, still it is not acceptable. The current system has multiple problems, which is why it must be changed. Changing the non-severability clause to a severability clause will retain the significant and needed regulatory system reforms achieved through bipartisan efforts that are reflected in other parts of the bill.
3. This bill would make it a crime for investigators to release information about an investigation to anyone outside the newly created agency. This does not uphold the principles of open government, and does not promote government accountability. There should be no loss of our current level of transparency in discussions and investigations dealing with campaign finance issues.

The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin had hoped that the Legislature and the Governor would come to a bipartisan agreement to make our state government accountable, as they promised. We hope that a new, strong, effective ethics bill will yet be passed this legislative session.

Sincerely,

Melanie G. Ramey, President
League of Women Voters of Wisconsin

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