

Council of Metropolitan Area Leagues of Women Voters

Testimony to the Governor's Blue Ribbon Committee on the Metropolitan Council

October 26, 2020

The Council of Metropolitan Area Leagues of Women Voters (CMAL) is an Inter-League Organization established under the auspices of the League of Women Voters of the United States. CMAL was established in 1962 with the purpose of increasing the knowledge of its members and the public with respect to regional government issues.

CMAL is a membership organization comprised of 19 local League of Women Voters chapters in the seven-county metro area, with approximately 1200 members.

Like all League of Women Voters entities, CMAL is political but strictly non-partisan. We do not support or endorse any candidate or political party.

From August 2018 to January 2019, CMAL engaged in a study of Metropolitan Council governance. A committee of eight League members from five of the seven metro area counties led it.

The study committee (1) conducted interviews with stakeholders, including Pat Nauman (Metro Cities), Alene Tchourumoff (Metropolitan Council), Pahoua Yang Hoffman (Citizens League) and Kathleen Salzman (Metropolitan Governance Transparency Initiative) (see p28 of report for complete list) (2) hosted a public forum for League members and the general public, (panel members were Deb Dyson (House Research), Keith Carlson (Minnesota Inter-County Association), Charlie Vander Aarde (Metro Cities), and C. Terrence Anderson (University of Minnesota Center for Urban and Regional Affairs)), (3) reviewed the available literature, including the 2016 report from the Citizens League, the 2011 Legislative Auditor Report, historical reports from the Metropolitan Council library, and articles in the press, and, (4) with the help of 30 other League members, carried out interviews of over 50 local elected and appointed officials (mayors, county commissioners, city managers, county administrators, city community development and planning directors) (pg. 28-30) to gather their opinions of and interactions with the Metropolitan Council, utilizing a standardized questionnaire (pg. 33-36).

Based upon all of the above, the committee issued its report, Metropolitan Council Governance, to members in January 2019. The report included the results of the interviews with local officials (pg. 19-25), as well as, information regarding the pros and cons regarding Metropolitan Council governance issues (pg. 14-19).

In the interview process, we learned that interviewees felt the Metropolitan Council is working effectively with respect to the sewer system, transit/transportation (transit, BRT, LRT), livable communities grants, environmental cleanup grants, research, forecasting and planning assistance. The Metropolitan Council was seen as less effective with respect to communication, interaction with cities, public perception, transit in some cities or within cities, Comprehensive Planning (an onerous process

every 10 years) that is harder on smaller cities with small staffs, and “one-size-fits-all” with little flexibility (pg. 20-21). We also learned that elected officials have a different relationship with the Metropolitan Council than do their city or county staff, who stated their appreciation of the technical assistance from the Metropolitan Council staff. We urge you to review the report in its entirety.

In January and February 2019, the 19 LWV local chapters held meetings to discuss the governance issues and to vote on the consensus questions presented in the report. In March 2019 the CMAL Board tallied the votes taken at these meetings and adopted its position on Metropolitan Council governance. Each of the following positions had the support of more than 80% of those participating.

- The Governor should appoint members of the Metropolitan Council.
- Members of the Metropolitan Council should be appointed to fixed, staggered terms, and should be removable only for cause.
- Metropolitan Council members should be required to have a regional perspective, knowledge of regional issues, demographic diversity, and the ability to meet the time requirements for serving in the office.
- Metropolitan Council members should not be local elected officials or be directly elected to the office of Metropolitan council member.
- A nominating committee should recommend a slate of Metropolitan Council nominees to the Governor.

Respectfully Submitted,

Karen Schaffer

Chair, Council of Metropolitan Area Leagues of Women Voters (CMAL)