



Redistricting Reform
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 HOUSE STATE GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE
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As the General Assembly seeks to increase openness, transparency and accountability in state government, the Commonwealth Foundation believes reforming the process by which legislative districts are drawn in Pennsylvania will significantly improve the trust voters have in their elected officials.

With regard to redistricting, moving to a citizens’ commission, with constitutional restrictions on how districts can be drawn, would once again empower voters to choose their politicians, rather than politicians choosing their voters through the gerrymandering process. The current approach to drawing district boundaries is political and personal in nature and serves to protect incumbents from challengers and to entrench control of legislative districts.

We believe redistricting reform is among the most important reform measures for making the legislature more representative of constituents in Pennsylvania.

According to the National Conferences of State Legislators, 11 states either have redistricting commissions that don’t include legislators or restrict legislative participation in some way.

States that Limit Lawmaker Participation in Redistricting Commissions			
State	Members	Name	Restrictions
Alaska	5	Redistricting Board	No public employees
Arizona	5	Independent Redistricting Commission	Pool of voters
Arkansas	3	Board of Apportionment	No legislators
California	14	Citizens’ Redistricting Commission	Pool of voters
Hawaii	9	Reapportionment Commission	Restriction on commissioners running for legislature
Idaho	6	Commission for Reapportionment	No elected or appointed officials
Missouri	House: 18 Senate: 10	Apportionment Commission	Restriction on commissioners running for legislature
Montana	5	Commission	No public officials, restriction on running for public office
New York	10	Independent Redistricting Commission	No elected officials
Vermont	7	Legislative Apportionment Board	No members or employees of the legislature
Virginia	11	Independent Bipartisan Advisory Commission on Redistricting	No elected officials or employees of the legislature
Source: NCSL: http://www.ncsl.org/research/redistricting/2009-redistricting-commissions-table.aspx			

Such a reform would help Pennsylvania avoid the challenges of the last redistricting battle and allow lawmakers to focus on policy and legislation.

Following the 2010 Census results, lawmakers had to redraw both congressional and state legislative districts. The initial state legislative map was struck down by the state Supreme Court—requiring the 2012 elections to occur under the old lines, diminishing the proportional representation redistricting was supposed to protect.¹

Moreover, the significant work of legislative leaders to draft and then redraft district lines took time and political capital away from other priorities in not one but two legislative sessions. The political reality of the redistricting process distracted from all other issues and legislative business and left several policy priorities unresolved.

Both the redistricting commission and the legislative process for congressional mapmaking are inherently political, and every lawmaker seeking reelection (or higher office) has something at stake.

Additionally, our analysis suggests redistricting reform would not significantly alter the composition of the General Assembly. That is, it would not inherently benefit one party more than the other.

That is, in the November 2014 elections, Republican House candidates received 229,000 more votes than Democrats, with 30 House Republicans winning districts carried by Gov. Wolf. Republican Senate candidates received 202,000 more votes than Democrats in 2014 (in 25 races), and 9 Senate Republicans won districts carried by Gov. Wolf. These dynamics, not gerrymandering, explain the current legislative compositions.

That is not to say there are no gerrymandered districts; certainly there were lines drawn to protect one party or the other, and some drawn for the benefit of incumbent lawmakers. Such gerrymandering is poor governance.

But I raise this electoral analysis to dispel the notion that redistricting reform is a partisan issue. Rather, redistricting reform—convening a citizens' commission with limits on how counties can be divided, which HB 1835 embodies—benefits voters of this state.

Reforming the redistricting process to create a nonpartisan commission would provide better transparency and better representation of communities, and allow lawmakers to focus on legislating while getting politics out of the redistricting process.

¹ The final map for state legislative districts wasn't approved by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court until May 8, 2013.