



New approach to redistricting

Ohio lawmakers reach long-sought compromise to make process more bipartisan; reform awaits voters' approval

by Ohio Sen. Frank LaRose (Frank.LaRose@OhioSenate.gov)

Republicans and Democrats in the Ohio Senate and House reached a historic compromise agreement at the end of the 130th General Assembly this past December to reform the process by which Ohio draws state legislative districts, with the passage of HJR 12.

This innovative redistricting proposal is fair, bipartisan and transparent; it comes after years of discussion and months of hard work.

In a rare 4 a.m. Senate session following overnight bipartisan negotiation, I stood to tell my colleagues that we had arrived at a mutually agreed-upon solution, saying, "What we've come up with here is something that's not good for Republicans, something that's not good for Democrats, but something that is good for Ohio ...

"We've come up with a process for redrawing legislative lines that is going to yield more-balanced districts and that is going to be something that we will be proud of for a long time to come. It took a lot of late-night work and some elbow grease, but by working together, we were able to get it done."

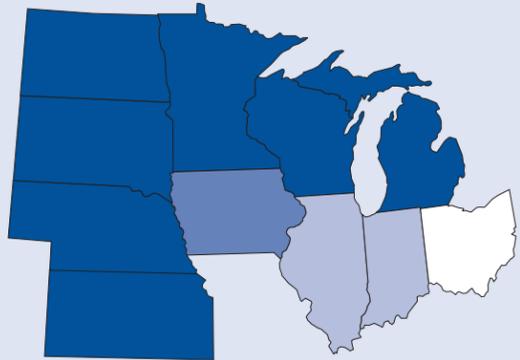
I am proud to have played a role in this achievement, having set comprehensive redistricting reform as one of my top priorities since my first Ohio Senate campaign in 2010 and having sponsored two resolutions that set out to reform the way we draw congressional and state legislative maps in Ohio.

Lengthy negotiations bear fruit

We finished up the 130th General Assembly in the early morning of Dec. 12, 2014, after 17 hours of negotiation that culminated in the passage of this resolution, reflecting terms agreed upon by representatives from both political parties in both chambers of the assembly. This measure passed the Ohio Senate overwhelmingly, by a vote of 29-1.

This proposal, which will be put before Ohio voters in the November 2015 election, creates a seven-member Redistricting Commission com-

Procedures for redrawing legislative, congressional district maps in Midwest



- Legislature develops/approves redistricting plans (in whole or through committees or appointments)
- Legislative Service Agency develops redistricting plans (subject to legislative approval)
- Legislature draws/approves redistricting plans (backup commission takes over in case of deadlock or failure to meet deadline*)
- Commission of state officials develops state redistricting plan (not subject to legislative approval)**; General Assembly develops/approves congressional redistricting plan

* In **Illinois**, the commission takes over if there is a deadlock over redrawing state maps; in **Indiana**, it takes over if the legislature cannot agree on congressional redistricting by the end of the year's session.

** In **Ohio**, the newly passed HJR 12 (which awaits voter approval) would change the partisan makeup of the commission and add an "impasse" provision that would shorten the period a district map would remain in effect if that map is not approved by a majority of the panel (including both of its representatives from the minority party in the General Assembly at the time).

Source: CSG Midwest, Ballotpedia

Under this provision the map would go into effect for four years, after which time the commission would reconvene to redraw and pass a new map that would go into effect for the remaining six years. Maps drawn under the impasse procedure would be

An effort was made to promote compactness and the preservation of communities of interest. To this end, the resolution provides for how and when counties, municipal corporations and townships may be split when forming General Assembly districts.

In addition, the resolution states that maps adopted by the commission should aim to meet three standards:

- Districts should not be drawn specifically to benefit a political party.
- The proportion of districts favoring each political party should mirror the statewide preferences of Ohio voters based on results of statewide partisan races over the preceding decade.
- Districts shall be compact.

Rejecting a formulaic approach

Because this process requires compromise and consensus, we took great pains to avoid a formulaic, "one size fits all" approach to redistricting.

We took an important step forward together, not as Democrats and Republicans, but as Ohioans. Working together to solve a problem that has vexed our state for decades, we are presenting our constituents with a solution that is fair, bipartisan and transparent.

The current unbalanced system for drawing legislative districts is unsustainable and a leading cause of political dysfunction, and the people of Ohio deserve better.

For years, an ever-growing number of citizens have been calling for reform to what is effectively a winner-take-all methodology for crafting districts in Ohio. Thankfully we heard their voices and acted.

There is no perfect solution, nor is there a magic formula that will yield district lines which everyone will find acceptable. The resolution we worked on instead creates a system that will compel statesmen and stateswomen to work together to draw fair, straightforward district maps that don't disproportionately benefit one party or another.

I support this reform effort, but I also must emphasize that even with the passage of HJR 12, the conversation on redistricting reform is not yet over in Ohio. Though it is a step in the right direction, HJR 12 is still missing an important component — provisions prescribing a process for congressional redistricting.

I am committed to working in furtherance of a comprehensive plan that includes congressional redistricting as we embark on the 131st Ohio General Assembly. ✦

Ohio Sen. Frank LaRose, a Republican from Copley, was first elected in 2010.

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posed of the governor, auditor, secretary of state, and four leaders from the legislature representing the majority and minority in each chamber.

The commission would commence in 2021 with the responsibility of drawing Ohio legislative districts based on the next decennial census. Approval of the map requires the votes of four members of the commission, including two votes from the minority party.

If a bipartisan map is passed, the legislative districts would be in effect for 10 years, until the next census. If the vote does not reach the necessary threshold of four — including two from the minority party — an "impasse" provision is triggered.

subjected to more-stringent standards, with the aim of constraining possible partisan excesses.

Significantly, this resolution requires all of the commission's meetings to be open to the public and broadcast by electronic means.

The resolution establishes that the Ohio Supreme Court has exclusive, original jurisdiction in all cases arising out of the redistricting process. HJR 12 states that the court is prohibited from ordering the implementation or enforcement of any plan not approved by the commission and may not order the commission to draw a particular district or adopt any particular plan.

Submissions welcome

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