

SENATE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON REDISTRICTING

Rockingham County Community Input Session

October 5, 2021

Meeting Minutes

Members of the Senate Committee Present: Senator James Gray, Senator Donna Soucy, Senator Regina Birdsell and Senator Rebecca Perkins Kwoka

Opening Summary

Senator Gray opened the Senate Special Committee on Redistricting.

Representative Griffin opened the meeting of the House Special Committee on Redistricting. This session is being video and audio recorded.

Representative Griffin explained that neither the Rockingham County Court or the County Commissioners have any involvement with this Public Input Session nor the Redistricting process.

Senator Gray introduced himself, Senator Soucy, Senator Birdsell and Senator Perkins Kwoka and reviewed Senate rules for proper decorum at a Senate meeting. The House members introduced themselves. Present were Rep. Barbara Griffin, Rep. Lucy Webber, Rep. Bob Lynn, Rep. Marjorie Smith, Rep. Len Turcotte, Rep. Wayne MacDonald, Rep. Matthew Wilhelm, Rep. Carol McGuire, Rep. Paul Bergeron, Rep. Connie Lane.

Testimony

Jane Armstrong – Exeter She is concerned about a fair, non-partisan, redistricting process. The most important criterion, in her view, is that every eligible town have its own representative. NH is proud to have 400 representatives because it allows the voters to interact with them where they shop and do business. That is why the amendment passed in 2006 to allow every town that is within a reasonable deviation, which this year is 3,444, its own district. In Rockingham County, 14 towns were eligible to have their own House District in 2010 but were denied. They include Atkinson, Auburn, Candia, Chester, Deerfield, Greenland, Kingston, Hampstead, Newmarket, Nottingham, Plaistow, Rye, Sandown and Seabrook. She is asking this committee to give these towns and others like them, what the constitution allows them, a representative who lives in town and knows the people and its issues. The Legislature has had ten years to fix this.

Steven Borne – Rye He asked that the committee fix the Gerrymandering that was occurred ten years ago. The people appreciate the work the Legislators do for \$100 a year. These sessions are a great first step but the most important step is the second one. He believes that comes when the draft maps are drawn and the people are given enough time to look at them and provide input. This will avoid the suspicion of Gerrymandering and confirm a transparent process, which is what the citizens of NH want. He continued that the maps should not benefit any one specific political party. The committee should know how much the state, cities or towns pay for each primary because if that money is going to benefit one party or another it is against the constitution. Rye has enough population to have its own representative but they are in a multiple town district.

Bernie Cameron – Deerfield She explained what can happen when a town is not allowed to have its own representative. Up until 2002, Deerfield had its own House District. That representative lived in Deerfield, knew it well, and interacted with the people in the community. Since 2002, their representative has been elected by the majority in their multi-town district. They have had people run repeatedly for town offices such as school board or select board and each time they have lost because they are well known in the community. She continued these same individuals are successful running for state representative because they are not know by the other towns in the district. They are elected solely based on their party rather than their accomplishments or their integrity which is not right. She believes it is time to return to Deerfield their right to have their own representative elected by the people of Deerfield.

Fred McGarry – Deerfield At their annual town meeting they voted 477 to 233 urging the Legislature to have fair and transparent redistricting on behalf of NH voters and to minimize multi-seat districts. He quoted the constitutional amendment regarding a reasonable deviation of population. The population of Deerfield is 4,855, well in excess of the required 3,444 for each representative in NH. His select board received petitions from over 80 voters calling for the boards to urge this committee to create a representative district exclusively for Deerfield.

Virginia Clifford – Candia She shares the concerns of the previous speakers. In her town they vote for 3 representatives in one district and 1 representative from another district. None of them live in Candia. She believes it would be very beneficial for Candia to have its own representative in Concord. They have almost 4,000 people now.

June Fabre – Exeter Her town is part of Senate District 23. She believes that Senate District 23 fails to represent her due to a partisan advantage for republicans in her district. The gerrymandering is subtle but significant and she would like to see the district lines drawn in a non-partisan way instead of continuing to favor

republicans. The process has been to design her district so that the number of democrats are just enough to almost but not quite win elections. The result is that the large number of democrat votes have been wasted. This is called an efficiency gap. Diluting the democratic votes this way makes her district and others less competitive. Her voice has not represented by the republicans elected in the past. Now is the time to right this wrong and redistrict in a non-partisan way.

Rep. Joe Guthrie – The town of Hampstead is in a district with Kingston and has four representatives. They work hard to make sure they have two from Hampstead and two from Kingston. Both towns are approaching 9,000 each in population and he asked the committee to consider that when they are drawing the new maps. He appreciates the openness with which this committee is conducting these sessions across the state. The most important thing that they should be concerned with throughout this process is transparency. He believes that the guidelines set them up to fail. They cannot do their job without failing one community or another. Gerrymandering assumes that they are making decisions strictly based on politics and he submits that this is not the case. He is confident that the people on these committees will work hard to be fair but because of the guidelines it will look like gerrymandering. In order to make the process more transparent he suggested changing the makeup of their committees or change the rules.

Chris Muns – Hampton There is nothing more essential for voters to believe in their democracy, than to have this process be transparent and fair. He hopes the input that the committee has received from the public will be reflected in the work that they do. He stated that it is unfortunate they did not give the public a chance to testify remotely. He urged them to reconsider that decision for the remaining sessions. He believes that it is essential that the public have a chance to provide input after the draft maps are drawn. This will demonstrate the process used to draw the maps was fair. The public needs at least ten days-notice for this. He added that the two best litmus tests to determine whether the process was fair, will be what they do with the two Congressional Districts and the Executive Council Districts. The population has not changed enough for any big changes to the Congressional Districts. He believes it will be telling if they adopt maps that bisect Manchester or propose to move it from Congressional District 1 to Congressional District 2. Executive Council District 2 is one of the best examples of gerrymandering in the country. All of the Executive Council Districts need to be drawn so they represent communities of similar interests and a partisan balance that exists within the state. The same should be done with the Senate Districts. Wherever possible any town that has enough population to have its own representative should have it and they should minimize Floterial Districts. When Floterial Districts are necessary he suggests they use the criteria of shared

interests. Hampton, with a population of almost 16,000 people, should have at least four state representatives.

Ken Hajore – This process would not be his first choice for redistricting. He would have an independent body made up of an equal number of democrats and republicans and citizens. He knows some representatives that are anything but fair-minded and that is what he is afraid of. There are a lot of criteria that they could follow to draw the maps but the worst criteria is party affiliation. He added that just because one party is in the majority does not mean they cannot be fair.

Harriet Cady – The last redistricting was done by the courts and they joined the districts how they saw fit. She would like every town to have its own representative but she realizes they have 400 Representatives and 24 Senators for the whole state. She would like to have a Legislator in her town that she can talk to and ask questions of. When she was a representative, she made an effort every month to go to each town and talk to the people. It is a hard job because there is always someone unhappy. She believes the people need education in how New Hampshire's Legislature works.

Laurie Warnock – Hampstead She agrees with Mr. Guthrie that Hampstead deserves their constitutional right to representation. They have a population of over 8,000 and do not share schools or public safety resources with any other community. She believes that the public should have at least ten days' notice to give input on the draft maps and that they should have remote access to do it.

Skip Berrien – Exeter They have the opportunity to address the fractured status of New Hampshire society by conducting an open and fair redistricting process. Rockingham County has experienced significant growth and changes in the last decade. He lives in Senate District 23 and from there, served three terms in the NH House of Representatives. The towns in this district have divergent orientations. They are either towards I93 in Salem or towards the seacoast. He proposes a plan to redistrict Senate District 23. This alternative district will include major economic centers and school districts that are now spread over three Senate Districts. It would take into account the natural affinities of the population in everyday life. Additionally, it would continue with republican domination, however, there would be a slight increase in democrat voters which would contribute to a more equitable political division. He offered this plan for their consideration which will maintain a stable population size within the district.

Rep. Jaci Grote - She asked that the draft maps be drawn and shared with the public so they have a chance to give input.

Matthew Stover – Chester On May 15, 2021, the town of Chester, passed unanimously, an article urging the NH General Court to carry out redistricting in a fair, transparent way, through public meetings, not favoring any political party but including communities of interest and minimizing multi-seat districts. The town also urged the committees to allow Chester and other towns with adequate population, their right to representation. Chester is currently in Rockingham District 4 which has five representatives serving three towns. Chester is a unique community and would like to have their own representative. State Representatives have a tremendous impact on their way of life and how much property tax will increase or decrease. The fact that property tax is controlled by the state and not the towns is what they call the New Hampshire disadvantage. A dedicated representative from the Chester community will be able to focus on what will affect the citizens of Chester.

Dana Theokas – Chester She asked the committee to consider a more inclusive opportunity for a more diverse group to speak to them. In Chester they have a small, active community and meet their representatives at the town fair, at the transfer station and on election day. She believes if they do not have someone in their community to represent them, that they do not have direct representation as the constitution calls for. She looks forward to the opportunity, after the maps are drawn, to discuss how the committee chose to put the communities together.

Kristi St. Laurent – Windham The town of Windham passed a Warrant Article that requested this committee to conduct a fair and transparent redistricting process that is respectful of the interest groups that make NH a great place to live. She asked that they allow communities that are eligible for their own representative to have one. This makes getting to know your representative possible and provides a two way street of information. She requests that the public be given enough time to look at the draft maps and provide input.

Alice Passer – Greenland She hopes that they take their jobs seriously as far as fair and transparent redistricting. She agreed that the public should be able to see and comment on the draft maps.

Trish Jidd – Kingston - Kingston and Hampstead share a district and Hampstead is much larger than Kingston. Currently, the representatives have agreed that of the four, two should be from each community. This does a disservice to Hampstead, because, if they just went on votes, Hampstead would have more of a say than Kingston does. She added that there is no way to guarantee equal representation as it is just an agreement between the current representatives. Each of the towns have enough population to qualify for their own representatives. They do not share a school district or any public services.

Phyllis Mackey – Exeter She supports a non-partisan independent commission to conduct redistricting to ensure a fair and transparent process. She would like future meetings to have remote access and a chance to give input on the draft maps.

Victor Helenic – Salem He strongly believes in voting and that we need to make sure that voting is desirable. Redistricting can make voters excited about voting again and make a difference.

Kevin Fleming – Exeter There is a cynicism in the younger generation that money and partisan politics have ruined democracy. He asked that the committee be attentive to be strong and fair and avoid accusations of gerrymandering.

Rep. Debra Altschiller – Stratham These public hearings should be accessible via zoom to those that cannot be here to testify. Her town passed a warrant article that demanded a fair and transparent redistricting process and commission. She believes this is a partisan process but they must try hard to avoid gerrymandering and draw fair maps. They should consider shared school districts and common interests. She asked that they do not break up school districts over multiple voting districts and that they be grouped together to mirror the communities. Stratham would like their Floterial Representative be within their school district. In Rockingham County there have been changes in populations and many towns are entitled to their own representative. She stated that Executive Council District 2 is a poor reflection of New Hampshire and she believes they can do better. She asked that the Congressional Map be reflective of the competitiveness that the maps have now. The public needs to have more notice of these sessions for transparency and to give input. The public also needs digital accessibility to the draft maps and she asked that they come back once the maps are done for input.

Mark Malone – Epping Having a representative in your town if you have the population should be a key mission of this committee. He requests that the public be able to see the first draft to give input.

Katherine Rocky – Hampton She commented that the front porch is no longer the place where they communicate with their constituents and neither is a closed room like the one they are in. She asked that they keep in mind how they will communicate to the people and what their goal is.

Mark McLaughlin – North Hampton He worked with Open Democracy and learned a lot about map drawing and redistricting. It is really important when the maps are drawn that they be explained to the public. He would like to see the districts be competitive across the board.

Kay Galloway – Atkinson She stated that each of their towns are deserving of independent districts with a representative.

Eric Turner – Brentwood He agrees with the idea of keeping school districts and common interests together. He believes that it would be great if they could let the public know all of the underlying elements that went into drawing the maps. This would give the public a chance to see the methodology that went into the final results.

Virginia Clifford – Candia She commented on the alignment of the districts.

Rep. Norman Major – He agrees that they need to make as many single districts as they can so that these communities are not robbed of their representatives.

Representative Griffin confirmed that the meeting was live streamed from the start with no disruptions. She added that the public does have remote access to both the Senate and the House Special Committee on Redistricting on the General Court Homepage. There are links on the site to look up the committee members, watch the meetings, email testimony, and look at maps that have been submitted.

Meeting Adjourned