

SENATE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON REDISTRICTING

Sullivan County Community Input Session

October 13, 2021

Meeting Minutes

Members of the Senate Committee Present: Senator James Gray, Senator Donna Soucy

Opening Summary

Senator Gray opened the Senate Special Committee on Redistricting. Representative Steven Smith opened the meeting of the House Special Committee on Redistricting. This session is being video and audio recorded.

Representative Smith explained that while they are in this facility neither the Courts of NH or the County Commissioners of Sullivan County have anything to do with this Public Input Session or the redistricting process as it is underway in the General Court. Staff has worked to secure locations to have these sessions.

Senator Gray introduced himself and reminded the public that the Senate does not allow cheering, clapping or booing. Input should be provided at the microphone. Senator Soucy introduced herself. The House members introduced themselves. Present were Rep. Steven Smith, Rep. Marjorie Smith, Rep. Lucy Webber, Rep. Wayne MacDonald, Rep. Bob Lynn, Rep. Connie Lane and Rep. Wilhelm

Representative Smith explained that information on the redistricting process for the House of Representatives and the Senate can be found on the General Court website. On the page for the Special Committee on Redistricting they will find a link that will enable them to email all committee members as well as a link for meeting minutes, recordings, and upcoming meeting information. He commented that these sessions are important because they want to hear local knowledge. Insights about which towns share common interests, or which towns in a district do not share common interests, are very useful to the committees.

Testimony

Rep. Linda Tanner – Sunapee – She represents a floterial district with a total population of 20,761 according to the 2020 census. She believes that NH, as well as Sullivan County, have some grossly gerrymandered districts. She is concerned about fair maps in the Congressional Districts, the Executive Council Districts and Senate Districts. Senate District 9 and Executive Council District 2 result in unequal representation and represent a partisan priority and they need to be

addressed. She supports a fair, open, transparent process and an independent redistricting committee. The current population and number of representatives in eight towns of her floterial district are as follows:

Cornish	1616	3 reps
Croydon	801	2 reps
Grantham	3404	3 reps
Newport	6299	3 reps
Plainfield	2459	3 reps
Springfield	1259	3 reps
Sunapee	3342	2 reps
Unity	1581	3 reps

She believes the goal of fair redistricting should be equal population among the various districts so that the vote of each citizen for representation in NH's House is approximately equal in weight to that of any other citizen. A 5% deviation is allowed. Floterial districts are complicated and confusing and pose several disadvantages for the voters. The average citizen doesn't know what a floterial district is, what it accomplishes, or why it exists. She stated that they do not interact with the floterial representative in everyday life. She added that when voting on an issue in the House, with eight towns it is difficult to represent all their local government, schools, and economies fairly. She urged the committee to create as many single districts as possible. She suggested creating a single representative district for Grantham and Sunapee and a two-representative district for Newport. She also asked that the committee set multi-town districts with a priority on their economic and governmental connections and eliminate floterial districts.

Rep. Sue Gottling – Sunapee She suggested that the committee restore Sunapee's status as a single district. Based on the 2000 census, Sunapee was a single district, a status that many of the town's citizens worked hard to achieve and valued highly. In 2010, Sunapee lost its standing and found itself allied with a town with which it shared no common interests as part of a huge floterial district. To many in Sunapee it felt like a gerrymandered decision. She asked the committee to partner Sunapee with towns that they share common interests with if their map keeps them connected with the other towns. She suggested Springfield, who Sunapee has a contract with for use of the transfer station and a shared watershed.

Rep. Brian Sullivan - He agreed with everything that Rep Tanner said about the confusion and disadvantages of floterial districts. Getting out to meet the voters is easier for a person with 1 or 2 towns than for a person with 8 towns. In his district he has towns that can only be accessed by a dirt road that require four-wheel drive. He suggested that it makes sense to create two districts. Cornish, Plainfield, and Grantham are very separated from his other towns. It would make sense to have

two districts with Plainfield and Cornish as one, and Grantham and Springfield as the other. Grantham and Plainfield are only joined by a game preserve and do not have any other common ground.

Ben Mortell – Unity He hopes that the committee will take action on the public's concerns as they travel around the state. Redistricting has become a very partisan issue. It is very important that they ensure that this redistricting process is transparent, inclusive and fair so that NH residents do not get even more cynical about politicians. His concerns surround communities of interest, and he believes that when putting the representative districts together, the focus should be on where the residents work, shop, go to church, receive medical care and share common recreation areas. Sullivan County would be better served if all of the County was within one Senate District. Having a Senator trying to balance the communities of Unity and Weare can be very difficult. Unity has a small population with a large geographic area. One side is close to Claremont and the other side is close to Newport. He asked the committee, when creating new representative districts, to carefully figure out how to join up the small communities so that the residents can share common interests. Executive Council District 2 is a clear example of excessive gerrymandering. Sullivan County does not have anything to do with the towns on the seacoast that are in the same Executive Council District. True transparency requires that the public have a chance to comment on the proposed maps before anything is final.

Rep. John Cloutier – He urged the committee to do a fair and impartial redistricting job for the Senate Districts, the Executive Council Districts, Congressional Districts and County Commissioner Districts. He has been involved in two redistricting efforts. In 2000, the maps ended up being drawn by a judicial master from South Carolina. He went from representing one district in Claremont to representing Claremont and two towns in Sullivan County, which had five seats in the House. The problem with that was the City of Claremont dominated the district with only one occasion in ten years that a candidate was elected outside of Claremont. He urged the committee to create as small of districts as possible so that the smaller communities will have a voice in the House. If they have to join some communities they should look at areas of common interest. Cornish and Plainfield share a school district and have a history together.

Ellis Robinson – Grantham She would like to make four points for the committee to consider. Sullivan County's communities of interest follow major transportation routes. Some towns follow the Connecticut river on I-91 and Rt. 12A. There is only one continuous east-west route in the County which is State Route 11. Grantham only has easy access to 89. She added that there are real challenges for the towns that are not on one of those routes. Her second point is that Sullivan County is purple in that there is a near tie between democrats and republicans. She asked the

committee to please make sure voting districts reflect this balance. Her third point is that NH is also a purple state. The committee should pay special attention to this balance and make districts as competitive as possible. Her last point for the committee is that she would like more meetings like this once the draft maps are drawn for the public to provide comment. She mentioned that Governor Sununu told NHPR's Laura Knoy that if any of the redistricted maps were gerrymandered, he would veto them.

Kya Messinger – She agrees with the last speaker that they are a purple county. She hopes that the committee will join communities that are like-minded and that once the maps are drawn the committee will come back and give the public a chance to comment.