

SENATE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON REDISTRICTING

Carroll County Community Input Session

October 14, 2021

Meeting Minutes

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

Opening Summary

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

Representative Griffin explained that while they are in this facility neither the Courts of NH or the County Commissioners of Carroll County have anything to do with this Public Input Session or the redistricting process as it is underway in the General Court. The General Court Staff worked to book this location.

Senator Gray introduced himself and reminded the audience that Senate rules do not allow any cheering, booing, clapping. If they would like to express an opinion, they should come up to the microphone and speak. Senators Birdsell and Perkins Kwoka introduced themselves. The House members introduced themselves. Present were, Rep. Marjorie Smith, Rep. Lucy Webber, Rep. Barbara Griffin, Rep. Bob Lynn, Rep. Paul Bergeron

Representative Griffin 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. Additionally, there is a link for the public to upload testimony or maps for the Committee to review. Redistricting is a process that happens every ten years with the federal census. It is important for the Committees to hear what works and what does not in your county and district.

Testimony

Rep. Jerry Knirk – The goal of redistricting is to achieve equal representation when the population shifts. He believes gerrymandering has been used by both Democrats and Republicans to strengthen the political grip of the party in power. The evils of gerrymandering are a decrease in competitive districts, an increase in political extremism and a widening of the political divide. The process the

committees are conducting can be done in a way to limit politics. There have been programs developed to help with redistricting and tools to help be sure that the process is fair. He urges the use of maps and metric algorithms as well as using the principles of communities of interest. Bottom line is that it is critical for the redistricting maps to be done transparently and fair for the people.

Ellen Farnum - Tamworth She believes there are four actions that the committees must take after they complete these community input sessions. 1. They should immediately disclose the criteria they are using to create the new voting districts. 2. Once the maps are drawn they need to immediately be made available to the public and the public given an opportunity to comment on them. 3. The next hearings need to have an option for citizens to participate remotely. 4. She urged them to incorporate the population data with the community of interest data. The map-a-thon project has incorporated these data points and she believes they created good maps.

Gabrielle Watson – Tamworth They are a rural community and they are connected to a number of the communities around them through common interests. She is worried that the Country and NH communities are being divided and torn apart. That is why this process is so important, the public needs to have confidence in their democracy again. The public needs to understand the criteria the Committee is using to make this a fair and transparent process. She believes communities of common interest should stay together because they collaborate together. Communities on the far ends of a district do not have anything to do with each other. In Tamworth they share a lot in common with Barnstead and she would like to see them stay together. It is very important to her that the public be able to provide input once the draft maps are drawn. This listening session is great but she would like to see their criteria and the draft maps once they are complete. She believes the public will need at least two weeks' notice of any hearing on the draft maps. She urged them to have at least one stand-alone Zoom meeting for the people who cannot come out.

Leonard Witt – Sandwich In his opinion the balanced approach to this process, will best serve Republicans, Democrats, Undeclared Voters, our state and democracy as a whole. He provided three stories that happened during the last week or so. The first was an example of extremists among the Republican Party. Story One: Nine GOP members of the New Hampshire House of Representatives recently co-sponsored a bill which states “the state peaceably declares independence from the United States and proceeds as a sovereign nation.” This is what extremist leaning redistricting brings forth.. Story two: The NH Executive Council, with its GOP Majority, followed the lead of the anti-maskers, antivaccine extremists and rejected \$27 million in federal funding to help the state fight Covid-19. They did so even though Governor Chris Sununu later said, “Our state (COVID-19) response

really depends on this money” it’s “ a disservice to all who we are elected to serve.” He believes that to anyone watching, it seemed the Executive Council caved into the screaming mob. New Hampshire is the only state to have declined the funding and in essence gave our hard earned tax dollars away to support other states like Massachusetts, Vermont, New York and New Jersey to fight covid. Story Three - In Moultonborough, similar anti-vaccine, anti-mask groups demanded via petition that a vote be held by the school board. The petition demanded that masks be optional for extra curricula activities. It would reverse the school board’s mandate. The good people of conservative leaning Moultonborough voted to support the school board's mask mandate. More than 350 voted and 57% voted for the mandate. He stated that this committee has a choice as they make redistricting plans, will they listen to the good people of Moultonborough or the extremists, some of whom would divide our nation and separate New Hampshire from it. It could backfire and permanently hurt the GOP, especially, if Moultonborough is a sign of where rational voters are heading, which is away from extremist politics

William Farnum – He would like to know what the criteria is that they will be using. He has looked at the maps that were drawn by Open Democracy. They look like they were created with fairness in mind. Fairness is important because in NH there are almost equal democrats and republicans. When the maps are published the public should have a chance to comment and have some input. He believes it would be good if the committee adopts the maps that are on display.

Hon. Ed Butler – Harts Location He appreciates that the committees have websites but probably many have not looked at it. He encourages everyone to look at the House website and review the information. Transparency is critical. If it is possible to provide a process where the public can see the work that the committee does and have an opportunity to comment, it will go a long way to build the public’s trust. He asked the committees to have a least one virtual meeting. He lives in the little finger at the top of Carrol County almost into Coos County. Some of the maps he has seen suggest that his towns affinity is North instead of South to the Conways. Most of the residents in his town are going south, not north and he hopes they will not change what they have now. The Senate District that is proposed has them going to the North and that is not where the common interests are.

Rep. Marjorie Smith asked if there is a historic reason for why Harts Location is in Carrol County.

Hon. Ed Butler replied he is sure there is a reason and he will look for it and send it to the committee.

Rep. Mark McLaukey – Carrol District 3 He has been through this process on two occasions and he cautions the committee that some have drawn the lines and then never hold office again. They do not hold office again because they have taken

their job seriously and when the lines are drawn it does not always benefit the people on the committee. His position is that he will stand proud and serve whomever they give him.

Hon. Bill Morrow – As a young democrat growing up around here he was appalled at the number of republicans around him and wished that it could change. As an older man he would like them to make the process fair.

Peggy Merrill – Madison She worked on the census with her husband and enjoyed the process. She asked where the information is that they gathered and how is it impacting what they are doing. **Rep. Griffin** replied that she will do an overview at the end to answer that.

Bob Cosleau – West Ossipee Party affiliation should not have anything to do with the redistricting process. He and others are dismayed by what each party has done. This committee should not care what their parties have done. Their focus should be simple, fair, balanced maps. He understands that they cannot make everyone happy but his hope is that the committee comes up with something most everyone is happy with.

Rep. Jerry Knirk – It is difficult to overtly gerrymander the House Districts given the large number of representatives. He believes that the multimember districts are where they tend to see efficiency gaps in terms of the representatives. He asked that as much as possible they would try to avoid multimember districts as this ends up packing the population. He asked about the population numbers on the map and if they have to do with the deviation from the ideal population for a representative.

Rep. Griffin replied that she believes it is the over under from the current maps but there is probably nobody at the meeting that can give him a definitive answer on that.

Rep. Lucy Webber replied that it is the deviation of the magic number which last time was 3,291 and is now 3,444. She added that because they have to keep towns together, not cross county or state lines, trying to make the numbers come out right can be difficult.

Rep. Griffin explained that the population in the state has gone up so the number per representative will be slightly higher. She continued by reminding everyone that the public can view these meetings as they are happening on YouTube. There will be a YouTube video of this meeting posted tomorrow on the General Court/ Special Committee on Redistricting Website. Also on the website are the laws that govern redistricting, the meeting minutes, submissions to the committee, and the criteria that they have to follow. They have to make certain assumptions in regards to cities and populations. When you try to take four hundred representatives and allocate them throughout the population of NH, it can be difficult. She explained

that on the website they can view maps and review testimony that has been submitted. There are bills for each of the districts that will be drawn and they can be accessed and testimony submitted. If they can participate in Zoom meetings then there should be no problem getting on the website to review the information and email testimony to all members.

Senator Gray commented that the House and Senate have separate sites. The easiest way to access them is on the General Court Website home page. If anyone wants to send testimony to both committees they will need email the committee or upload testimony on both websites.

Senator Perkins Kwoka asked if Rep. Griffin could explain what happens next, after all of the community input sessions are completed.

Senator Gray replied that the Senate will have a meeting on the 25th for the committee members to discuss the next steps.

Rep. Griffin stated that the House Committee will be meeting on the 20th. The rest of the meetings have not been scheduled yet but they will be on the website as soon as possible. November 18th is the deadline to vote on the maps.