

# SENATE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON REDISTRICTING

## Belknap County Community Input Session

October 19, 2021

### Meeting Minutes

---

**Members of the Senate Committee Present:** Senator James Gray, Senator Regina Birdsell

#### 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 and will be placed on the House and Senate Websites.

Representative Smith 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.

The House members introduced themselves. Present were, Rep. Marjorie Smith, Rep. Lucy Webber, Rep. Steven Smith, Rep. Bob Lynn, Rep. Paul Bergeron, Rep. Len Turcotte, Rep. Wayne MacDonald, Rep. Travis O'Hara

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 give input . Senator Birdsell introduced herself. Senator Soucy introduced herself.

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 there is 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 occurs every ten years with the federal census. It would be helpful if those that provide testimony would give input on what would benefit this County.

## Testimony

**Don House – Belmont** Belknap County passed a warrant article for fair and nonpartisan redistricting along with over seventy other communities. He believes transparency and fairness are crucial to the redistricting process. Committee hearings should be open for testimony on Zoom. Draft maps should be available for public comment before they vote on them. Five towns within Belknap County qualify for their own representative according to the NH Constitution. Districts should be competitive and reflect the people that live there. As a Belknap county resident, he would like to see it less carved out. They have three Senate Districts for a county with 70 thousand people.

**Claudia Ferber – Gilmanton** She questioned why Gilmanton does not have an exclusive seat in the NH State House of Representatives? The NH State Constitution Part 2, Article 11, states a town/city must have a population of more than 3,444 to have an exclusive seat. Gilmanton meets this threshold according to the 2020 US CENSUS. Gilmanton met this threshold in 2010. Because of the 2010 redistricting Gilmanton and Alton share two seats in the State House of Representatives and one floterial seat with Alton and Barnstead. Gilmanton passed a warrant article (435 yes — 125 no) in March 2021 asking for an exclusive seat and a fair, transparent, and nonpartisan redistricting process. She questioned why Gilmanton shares two house seats with Alton and one house seat with Barnstead. Other than sharing land boundaries, Gilmanton does not share any municipal services and their tax base is quite different. Gilmanton was its own district until the end of the 1960's and then again for a period beginning in the 1970's. At that time, George B Roberts, Jr (R) who still resides in Gilmanton represented Gilmanton and served fourteen years in the House and as Speaker of the House from 1975-1980. In 2010, redistricting changed things and Gilmanton and Alton became a district sharing two house seats and one floterial seat with Alton and Barnstead. She questioned why Belknap County has three NH State Senate Districts? One can travel north to south, east to west of Belknap County in less than one hour. Currently, Belknap County's has towns/cities divided up into 3 districts with towns/cities from Grafton, Strafford, and Merrimack Counties. Gilmanton is currently in District 6 and shares a NH State Senator with New Durham, Farmington, Rochester, Alton, and Barnstead. The only commonality is that Alton and New Durham have a common land boundary. She asked the Committee members to consider her three requests: 1. Redistrict so Gilmanton and Alton each has an exclusive seat in the NH House of Representatives. 2. Redistrict the NH State Senate seats so that Gilmanton's representation is in a District with only towns within Belknap County. 3. Schedule public hearings before the legislature votes on the redistricting maps.

**Lew Henry – Gilmanton** Redistricting needs to be accomplished in a fair, nonpartisan, and transparent manner, unfortunately the previous two Redistricting Plans, from 2001 and 2011, were not done this way, leading to much controversy. In 2011 his home town of Gilmanton was Constitutionally entitled to a single, non-shared seat in the NH House but they did not get it. Not only is this seat specified in the NH Constitution, but it is also the fairest way to reach the ideal of "one person, one vote". Instead, they were given two seats shared with Alton, and one seat shared with Barnstead and Alton. Gilmanton is a very different place than Alton, they share very little except a border. They do not share a school nor an Executive Councilor. Their geography is different, as Gilmanton is mostly fields, forests, and farms, with very few businesses. They do not share a shoreline of Lake Winnepesaukee with Alton and their tax structure is very different from Alton's. Because of the total lack of transparency and fairness in the 2011 Redistricting process they had no input into correcting it. This is a violation of the NH Constitution which they hope this committee will rectify before more violations are forced on us. The next thing that could happen is placing them in a district with a non-contiguous town, which would also violate the Constitution. He is including with this statement a copy of the letter from Gilmanton's Board of Selectmen to the leaders of the NH House and Senate and also a copy of the Warrant Article 18 that was voted on at our Town Meeting. Based on the overwhelming, bipartisan vote (435 yes, 125 no) in support of Warrant Article 18 titled "New Hampshire Resolution for Fair Nonpartisan Redistricting", their Board of Selectmen urge that the Redistricting Committee ensure a fair and transparent Redistricting plan, without gerrymandering, by holding public meetings such as they are here, and that Gilmanton be given its single, non-shared Representative in the NH House.

**Nathaniel and Elizabeth Abbott – Read by Mr. Henry**

For every Gilmanton resident who pays a tax bill, the fattest part of that bill is for education. When we pay that bill, it is like being forced to buy expensive new shoes, or a fancy bicycle. Since we must educate our children, we can take pride in that purchase, because it is for our children and their futures. But the situation is this: For the same service of education, the Alton resident must only buy an average priced pair of shoes, or a discount store bicycle. They get the same result but pay less money. I feel differently about this situation as a resident of Gilmanton than a similarly situated resident of Alton. The policies of the State impact us differently, so we are very likely to have different views on this subject. It is a disease of the current Political climate that we can look at something that has a plain truth on its face and call it its opposite. Following the path of redistricting as it has proceeded up until now would be an example of doing exactly that. I would like to join the Gilmanton Select Board in urging the New Hampshire General Court to conduct redistricting to ensure fair and effective representation of New Hampshire voters

without gerrymandering. I also join them in further urging the General Court to carry out the redistricting in a fair and transparent way through public meetings, without favoring any particular party, and to include communities of interest and to minimize multi-seat districts.

**Rep. Norm Silber** – Every town and every city in NH wants to have their own exclusive representative. That cannot happen when you only have 400 representatives. When he first ran in 2016 there was no party primary and they ended up with two reps from Meredith and two from Gilford. In 2018, again, there was two from Meredith and two from Gilford. In 2020 there was a party primary and they ended up with three from Gilford and one from Meredith. Over each biennium there have been a back and forth between Meredith and Gilford. Redistricting is a political matter and has been given to the legislature to decide. He has been in touch with the town of Meredith and they feel they should have their own representative.

**Hunter Taylor – Alton** He is a County Commissioner but is here as a citizen of Alton. The committees need to adhere to the one person one vote rule. Four hundred representatives is unusual but it does represent commitment to localized representation wherever it can be accomplished. Belknap County has the fewest municipalities of any County in the state. One city and ten towns and eighteen representatives. He believes combination districts can be dangerous. In 2000 the legislature saw fit to create district five in Belknap County. Four towns, seven representatives with forty percent of the population of the county. In 2008, of the seven representatives, four were from the same town. Gilmanton has gone at least two biennium without a person from Gilmanton representing them. He believes they should give serious consideration to giving one seat to Alton, one to Barnstead and one to Gilmanton and a shared one between Alton and Barnstead who share a hospital and a superintendent. That would be fair to all involved. Gilford and Meredith both deserve their own representation because it is unfortunate when three of the four representatives are from one town. He encouraged the Committees to give Laconia five representatives as they make up 26% of Belknap County and need a strong delegation in Concord. He suggested that they give Tilton and Sanbornton their own representatives.

**Rep. Timothy Horrigan** He would like to have time to comment on the draft maps and plans once they are done. During the last redistricting there was no time for the public to comment after the maps were decided upon. Executive Council District 2 is very gerrymandered and needs to be changed. He suggested splitting Belknap into two Senate Districts instead of three. The current plan includes a district that is not contiguous in Belknap County. Gilford and Meredith share a boundary in the middle of Lake Winnepesaukee but they are in one representative district. He quoted from Article 11 of the State Constitution. He believes they can use a number

higher than 10% when looking at population numbers. He submitted written testimony that lays out a plan for districts.

**Sandy Muce – Meredith** Her local knowledge is pertinent because decisions are being made that affect the rights of citizens. The lines which are drawn connecting communities need to be executed with a clear understanding of local conditions. The entire Lakes Region may seem the same from outside the region, but it's not. The beauty and intent of New Hampshire's massive House of Representatives is to provide local representation. It's part of our unique and proud tradition. When communities that do not share common interests and goals are combined into one legislative district, as with Meredith and Gilford, both communities are disenfranchised. She knows that is neither the intent nor the purpose of this Commission. Although Meredith and Gilford may appear similar from afar and share a common boundary somewhere in the middle of Lake Winnepesaukee, they are unrelated in all the important ways. When Meredith had its own representatives, they were known in the community. They would run into them at the dump, the post office, and the bar at Harts. They shopped at the local stores, knew kids at the local schools, belonged to the local service clubs. They were part of the community. She is sure that's true for Gilford too. Although she does not know because even though she has friends in Gilford and have done business in Gilford, she is not part of their community. That is the problem with the current configuration. The geography, including Lakes and Mountains, affects the travel patterns, and there is no natural connection between Meredith & Gilford. NONE! Although that location in the middle of the lake may fulfill the letter of the law, which requires a common boundary, the spirit and intent of the law are frustrated. By combining the two towns, both are disenfranchised. Right now, Meredith is underrepresented, but the same could happen to Gilford. She encouraged the committee to repair this mistake and return Meredith to its own district.

**Lynn Montana – Meredith** – Every NH Voter has the right to expect this special committee to follow the Non-Partisan and Independent process for fair and transparent redistricting. Unfortunately, in 2010..." REDMAP (short for Redistricting Majority Project), was adopted by the Republican State Leadership Committee of the United States to increase Republican control of congressional seats as well as state legislators, largely through determination of electoral district boundaries. The project made effective use of partisan gerrymandering, relying on specific mapping software, where there was a Democratic majority but which they could swing towards Republican with appropriate redistricting. The project was launched in 2010 and estimated to have cost the Republican party around \$30 million." REDMAP's own website proudly sums it up best: "The party controlling that effort, controls the drawing of the maps - shaping the political landscape for the next 10 years". Even Karl Rove took to The Wall Street Journal saying, "He who

controls redistricting, controls Congress”. Whether Republican, Independent or Democrat, the majority of NH voters understand that it is advantageous to us all, to have fair, transparent and non-partisan redistricting procedures no matter which party holds the majority in Concord. In 2011 these procedures were not only absent in NH, but deliberately obfuscated and hidden from the public by party politicians who formed the Committee, and the result was a very partisan rearrangement of voting districts which, quite frankly to a great many NH voters, was appalling, shameful, and very UN- democratic. In 2011: 1. Decisions were made by three politicians and held in secret behind doors. 2. Public meetings were held after very short notice, with no maps for them to see. 3. Our state legislators were only allowed to view the maps a few days voting on the districts. 4. Any opposition or improvements were silenced. NH voters are here today in solidarity to let the committee know that they expect, the newest appointed members of this special committee, to act independently and without party bias when drawing up the redistricting maps for 2021 and the next 10 years. They would like to see the committee restore a fair and transparent voting system to NH in 2021. She is from Meredith, has lived here most of her life and voted since 1970. Prior to 2010, Meredith was its’ own singular voting district with two town representatives. This has not been the case since 2011, when they were coupled together through redistricting with Gilford. Numerous other NH towns have also been denied their historically independent districts.

**Steve Merrill – Meredith** Over the past few decades he has witnessed the deterioration of our norms and the decay of our core institutions. A deterioration which has accelerated over the past decade. A deterioration that began in our nation’s capital and now has bled into our great state. A deterioration that if left unchecked could undermine the very foundation of the country we all love. The reasons for this state of affairs are numerous and complicated but at the core it comes down to greed, greed for money, greed for power. He believes one significant influence on this decay has been partisan gerrymandering which has grown more powerful and more effective with the information technology revolution of the past 30 years. Modern computing technology combined with modern data analytics enable politicians to leverage voter data to maximize their probability of remaining in power against the will of the people. Just as Facebook, Apple and Google can predict which ads you’re likely to click on, voter analytics can predict how groups of people are likely to vote. With a background in physics and engineering and experience teaching statistics at the university level, he has the good fortune or perhaps misfortune of understanding just how powerful this technology is and how it can be used to undermine the principle of one person one vote which is at the core of our system of government. In 2010, a wave of republicans swept into our state capital and boldly asserted their authority over our voting system. The gerrymandering that resulted left one party with an unfair advantage in elections

for the ensuing decade. To achieve this goal, legislators chose to sacrifice the independence of Meredith and many other towns by taking away their representation. Though Meredith leans Republican (or rather because of this fact), they were combined with Gilford to form a single district with 4 representatives. Never mind that the only border they share is on the lake or that they share no resources or infrastructure. The obvious objective was to increase the number of house seats in the “r” category for the next decade. And it worked. The results of the 2010 gerrymander also had a profound impact on our state senate. From 2010 to 2020, Republicans controlled the state senate for 8 of the 10 years in spite of losing the overall vote total (i.e., the combined total of all 24 state senate races) by about 1.6%. The democrats needed a wave of their own to take the chamber for only 2 of the 10 years in the decade. In 2018, Democrats won the total vote count for the 24 seats by nearly 8% (53.9% - 6.1%) but only won 14 of the 24 seats. In 2012, the totals were 51-49% for the democrats, yet the republicans won 13 seats and thus chamber control. In 2014, the tally was 50.3%-49.7% again for the democrats. This time the Republicans picked up a seat, winning 14 that year. In 2016, the Republicans finally won an election. The count was 50.3% - 49.7% and you guessed it, the Republicans held the chamber, 14-10. Democrats needed an 8-point margin to win the same number of seats. The Republicans could win or lose by 1% and still win 14 seats. We have an evenly divided state and yet 16 of 24 state senate districts were controlled by a single party for the entire decade. Please don't repeat this mistake. For the good of our state, for the good of our people, please restore fairness to our electoral process. And please restore Meredith's independence.

**Cyndi Paulin – Gilmanton** She commented that they should brag about our citizen government. The representatives were people that they knew. When she was growing up her town of Farmington had two Representatives and one Senator. These were people she saw at ballgames, at the grocery store, at the bank and at community events. It was easy to give input to them. She is shocked that there is not a representative from Gilmanton. She requested that they restore the spirit and functionality of New Hampshire's citizen legislature.

**Rep. Sally Fellows** – She has a suggestion that they might find helpful in trying to keep all districts within the 5% deviation limit. This is most likely to be useful for counties with smaller populations where the perfect seat allocation (which is a two-digit decimal number) includes a fraction close to one-half. For example, Grafton county, with a population of 91,118, has a perfect allocation of 26.46 seats. While she was able to successfully map 27 seats (the current allocation) with just a few adjustments to the current configuration, she couldn't map 26 seats, even when using 3 or 4 floterials, and keep within the 5% deviation from the statewide target of 3,444. What she discovered was that only 3 seats were below the statewide target. The other 23 were over the target. The only one outside the 5% range was

over by just 5.47%. So, she wondered why it was so lopsided, with 3 under and 23 over. Since Grafton's allocation of 26 seats is nearly one-half a percent below the perfect allocation of 26.46 seats, there are 1,574 extra people that must be squished into 26 seats. That's an average 61 extra people, or 1.76% of the target, for each seat. If that excess could be evenly distributed over all seats, each would have a deviation of plus 1.76%. A deviation of that magnitude is more than 1/3 of the way to the maximum allowable deviation of 5%. Her suggestion is to develop county maps based on the statewide target of 3,444 people per seat, but if a few seats are a bit outside the 5% limit, test the deviation using a target that is the county population divided by the number of county seats. (For Grafton that would be 3,505.) If all the seats are then within 5%, she suggests the map should be deemed acceptable. Her second request is that after preparing draft maps they would please provide a second opportunity for community input. It is the people who live in each town who know which other towns are part of their community. This is particularly important for Grafton County, because it does not have a representative on the Redistricting Committee. It is generally accepted that public schools are an important element of shared interest. Her third request is that instead of using SAUs as the school link, you use high school of attendance. The only common denominator that all SAUs provide is shared SAU staff. Some don't include a high school, and some have districts that use different high schools. NHDOE publishes two high school lists, but neither has all towns by high school attended. She can provide them with a spreadsheet that can be sorted by town or high school.

**Eliza Leadbeater – Gilford** In 1992 there was unemployment of over 11% in this region. Belknap County had challenges and all eleven towns were very different. The delegation worked together for the benefit of all. The representatives knew their communities' needs. She doubts the representatives from Gilford know what Meredith needs and vice versa. She spends a lot of time in Meredith and there are a lot of differences. The reason why they were successful in the nineties was because the representatives knew their constituents and could come together to solve problems. She would like to get back to that, with each community having their own representative.

**Mo Baxley** – She was hoping that the legislation for the new maps would have been written so she could offer testimony. She asked that once the maps are done the committees would hold a hearing in Concord or online so that people can offer testimony on the legislation and the redistricting.

**Ruth Larson – Alton** The voters of NH and Belknap County have spoken in regards to fair and transparent redistricting. It is up to them as committee members to be as non-partisan as the voters have been. She has confidence that they will do the right thing.



**Jay Newton – Gilford** Redistricting will have a great impact on the strength and resiliency of the towns and counties of the state. Diversity is a characteristic that is really important to this process. Gerrymandered districts disenfranchise people who could provide new ideas and better participation in our towns. They have a big responsibility in deciding how strong NH will be over the next ten years. Being inclusive will make our state stronger and more resilient. He requests that the public would have a chance for input after the maps are drawn.

**Hon. David Huot – Laconia** Laconia has four representatives for about seventeen thousand people but in Belmont they a big population for one representative. He suggested that the committee take a good look at forming districts where so many people do not have to share the same representative.

**Tony Carita – Meredith** The town of Meredith had its own representative for over 200 years until they were joined in the same district with Gilford. They do not share a land border only a point in the middle of Lake Winnepesaukee. Additionally, they do not share any municipal services or any common commercial or healthcare interests. Gilford and Gilmanton share more common interests. He suggested that there is an easy solution for this problem. He asked the committee to consider splitting the four representatives into two for each town. The way it is now if three out of the four delegation reside in one town, they will put the best interest of that town ahead. The created districts should not be setting up a situation where one town will be disadvantaged over the other if they do not have to.

**Rep. Tim Lang - Sanbornton** They had a vote in his town for fair and non-partisan redistricting and he is here to bring that message to the committee. The town of Tilton is above the deviation for their own representative. He asked the committee to consider giving them one and use their overage in population for Sanbornton to create a floterial district between the two towns. The two towns share many common interests.

**Bill Donahue – New England** is the place where American Democracy is held most dear. He held Norman Rockwell's "Freedom of Speech" print and spoke of the man in the print being a dissenter of government. He commented that if there is gerrymandering this man would not have a voice to dissent. The New England town meeting is a model for democracy. He encouraged the committee to respect democracy and give Gilmanton it's own representative.

**Brian Beihl – Open Democracy Action – Alton** Throughout this year and part of last year, he has been engaged in educating the public on the redistricting process, what it means to have a fair process, and ways to create better maps than have been produced in the past two decades. They have run workshops about the best practices for fair redistricting featuring national experts that some of you have attended. They have educated towns about the Constitutional provisions for

redistricting, and with their partners assembled the Map-a-Thon coalition, in which over 250 people have now volunteered. They helped 74 towns around the state, from red towns like Alton, Franklin, Londonderry and Rindge, to blue towns like Lebanon, Durham and Keene, and every color in between. Those 74 towns represented 561,000 Granite Staters. With only five losses, it was only available time and the pandemic kept that number from being a supermajority of New Hampshire voters. They varied slightly in the language, but these cities and towns were asking for a fair, nonpartisan and transparent process. The voters who braved the pandemic to come out and vote on it, made it clear they want fair maps. In May, the Map-a-Thon coalition began its work, surveying NH cities and towns for communities of interest data. What they didn't get through surveys, they followed up by phone calls to town administrators. This yielded a list of 60 communities of interest criteria which the larger Map-a-Thon participants whittled down to five. The all-volunteer Mapping and Technical team was formed as a subset of this larger group, and is comprised of engineers, data analysts, software specialists, and GIS mapping experts. Taking the criteria, this team assembled maps from the State of New Hampshire Department of Education, Department of Environmental Services, Department of Health and Human Services and federal and academic sources. This helped them to create the overlays on their maps of regional high schools, health care regions, regional planning districts, shared municipal water and sewer, shared police and fire, and a couple of others. It's important to note that these overlays can be used with anyone's maps, as they are available for the asking. In addition to the overlays, members of the Map-a-Thon Mapping and Tech team created the analysis tools which can test their maps, and the maps of others, to see where there are weaknesses, mistakes, or intentional manipulation. Like Mr. Joel Anderson's software, one of their team members, Phil Hatcher, developed a computer software tool which makes mapping suggestions based on the NH and US Constitutional mandates and other factors. This has been a useful tool which has already made some suggestions that they hadn't thought of. While their maps are not perfect, they have proven that communities of interest can be implemented to retain regional high schools, shared water systems, health care regions, regional planning areas, and shared police, fire and EMS services, some of which, people have asked for in these hearings. This community of interest data, along with their maps, and supporting documentation is readily accessible to the committee. Tonight, he would like to take one more step and make a proposition. In consultation with the members of Map-a-Thon Mapping and Technical Team, they are offering their services to the two committees. The House Special Committee is up against a tight deadline. Their House maps are nearing completion, as close as they can get without redistricted city wards. They can work with the committee, joining policy & constitutional expertise and technical expertise. The DRA software allows for the implementation of many useful tools, including overlays, additional data sets and

other tools not available in Mr. Anderson's software. While the Senate has more time to create its Senate and Executive Council maps, they have proposals ready to analyze which improve competitiveness and compactness while being sensitive to communities of interest. New Hampshire has a long tradition of volunteer contributions to developing legislation.

**Jim McFarland – Meredith** As in 74 other NH towns, the fair and transparent Redistricting Resolution was passed overwhelmingly by Meredith's voters. This is a powerful and clear message to the committee that voters across the political spectrum care deeply that this once every decade redistricting be done fairly and impartially with no more gerrymandering. Their District 2 representative, Jonathan Mackie, testified at Town Meeting, on the record, to support restoring Meredith to their own district with their own exclusive representative.

Transparency is crucial to restore voter confidence lost in 2011s partisan, secretive and unfair redistricting which favored the party in power. Transparency means the following: 1) The software algorithm and criteria that will be used must be public. 2) 2020 census data for redistricting must be shared fully and openly with the public. 3) committee meetings must be open to the public with at least 7 days advance notice. 4) Detailed Redistricting Committee meeting minutes must be promptly posted publicly. 5) The hearings and listening sessions should be live-streamed and recorded and available on the committee's website so they are widely accessible. 6) Their meetings and County "listening sessions" like this one should be on ZOOM to allow those unable to physically attend to safely participate. 7) This committee must release their "draft" maps with sufficient time for public review/response. 8) Proposed drafts of maps must be shown at two county listening sessions for public response before they are voted on and adopted. 9) soliciting the contributions of and review by professional, non-partisan redistricting experts to assist the committee with the process, structure and criteria employed in redistricting challenges. 10) Their maps for submittal to the legislature for final vote to approve must have a consensus of approval from New Hampshire's voters, without this, voter trust in them, our leaders and democracy will further deteriorate. Specific to Meredith, per the November 7, 2006 Constitutional amendment on NH House redistricting, their committee must honor this amendment and restore Meredith to their own district with their own exclusive NH House representative(s). To do otherwise is to perpetuate the injustice inflicted on Meredith's voters in 2011 depriving them of their rightful representation.