

SENATE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON REDISTRICTING

Grafton County Community Input Session

September 28, 2021

Meeting Minutes

Members of the Senate Committee Present: Senator James Gray

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.

The County Sheriff gave instructions on the building exits in case of an emergency.

Representative Griffin explained that neither the Grafton County Court or the County Commissioners have any involvement with this Public Input Session nor the Redistricting process. Staff of the General Court have arranged locations for these Sessions in each County throughout the state. She continued with the process and procedures for the public to access the House redistricting website and explained that the NH Constitution places the responsibility of drawing district maps on the Legislature every ten years after the federal census is finalized. More information on the redistricting process can be found on the General Court Website.

Senator Gray introduced himself. The House members introduced themselves. Present were Rep. Webber, Rep. Lane, Rep. Rep. Marjorie Smith, Rep. Turcotte, Rep. MacDonald, Rep. Wilhelm, and Rep. McGuire

Testimony

Paul Phillips – Plymouth He asked that this not be the last time that the committee hear from the voters of Grafton County. They would like to have input on the draft maps when they are completed. He urged them to open the meetings to a remote session. Due to health concerns many are reluctant to attend an in person session. An increase in transparency can only help with voter confidence. The districts they will be drawing are for the citizens of New Hampshire not for elected officials. Fair redistricting is what is best for the people. The 2011 redistricting map made a Congressional District change for Grafton County and it is split into 3 different Senate districts. The floterial districts make sense in areas of high population but in Grafton county they have the opposite effect. They are large and spread out. In Grafton 17, it takes an hour to get from one side to the other. He urged that they keep the floterial districts as small as possible. The 2020 census

shows that people of color make up 13 % of the population. He asked that they do their best not to ignore the demographic shifts.

Susan Duncan – Bristol – She shared that after 22 years as a non-partisan employee for the State Senate, she observed that a majority of the Legislators never go further north than exit twenty. Their worlds revolve around the south of the state where it is more populated. They can see more constituents in one mall than Legislators in the north can see driving to fifteen places. She asked that, when redistricting, the committee please consider how large an area the districts north of exit 20 are. She continued that it takes a long time to get from point A to point B and do the job that Legislators in the south can do in one trip to the mall. It is not equal and those in the North Country would like it to be equal. There is a huge disadvantage to running a campaign in district 1. They would love to be part of the committee that makes these decisions.

Gail Kinney – Canaan – She is a longtime resident of a town that has been denied its representative. She implored the committee to be transparent with what they do and give voters fair notice for the meetings. To make this process as fair and transparent as possible the public should be able to review the draft maps once they have been drawn. Remote access is very important for these sessions and she would like them to do what they can to provide that. The Canaan Select Board has written to the committee in an appeal to give Canaan what it is legally entitled to, its own representative district. They have been robbed of this for the last ten years. The last redistricting was done behind closed doors , and the legislators did not care. In Part 2, Article 11 of the constitution it states that towns with sufficient population should have their own representative as long as it is within a reasonable deviation. At least 60 towns were robbed of having their own representative district. This constitutional requirement should be the basis of the redistricting process.

Cybele Merrick - Lyme – She believes that redistricting should be completed in as nonpartisan a manner as possible. There should be an even handed attempt at fairness so that all voices are heard. This will promote free and fair access to the polls. She asked that the committee schedule hearings after the draft maps are drawn.

Rep. Ned Gordon – Bristol – Bristol would very much like to have its own representative. The current population is around 3400 people which is within a reasonable deviation to have one. Currently, they have two representatives in a very large district and a floterial representative. When he looks at the districts it looks like they were created by a machine. They are lumped together just to have an ideal number. His district is five towns at the bottom of the county that do not have much of a common interest. Three of them share a school district but Ashland and Grafton both have their own schools. Additionally, there is only one road to get to

Ashland. He has to drive almost 40 miles to go from one high school to another in his district. Almost every district in the county is like that. If he were putting the districts together he would start by looking at the towns that share school districts. Ashland being on one side of the Merrimack River and Grafton on the other have nothing to do with each other and should not be in the same district. His suggestion is to look at the school districts. On the Senate side it would be best if there were only two counties in Senate District 2 instead of three.

Mike Sampson – Canaan He remembers when people gathered in communities for problem solving that was not partisan. His selectboard is mixed with democrats and republicans. But they all live in Canaan. They have a little under 3900 citizens and should have had their own representative in the last redistricting. They would like one seat that is in Canaan. They have two representatives and both of them are from Wentworth. In his own town he solves many problems every year, water, sewage, education funding, zoning, etc. Many issues are specific to Canaan not Wentworth. They just spent over one million dollars to fix water and sewage problems and received zero dollars from the state to cover the project. In terms of having a day to day voice in the legislature, they do not have one. Honor the constitutional requirement and give them a voice. Please consider this and make it happen. They would like a voice from their town to represent and problem solve for them in Concord.

Linda Massimilla – Littleton There is a nice balance of representation the way the North Country is laid out right now. They know how to network and work together to address North Country issues, which is one of their greatest strengths.

Darla Bruno – Lebanon The voters are tired of the partisanship and the gerrymandering. They want fairly drawn districts that are neutral and logically drawn. If the committee is using software to help draw the maps, the public wants to know what the algorithms are that are deciding what the districts should be. She asked for access to these meetings for the sick and the elderly that cannot come out physically to the meetings.

Charlie Townsend – Canaan He served in the NH House for four terms and he was there during the 2011 redistricting. He is well acquainted with the constitution. He has heard committee members state that 90% of the redistricting decisions are based on population and only 10 % on other things and he believes that should be changed. Equal population does not mean equality of towns. For example, the same regional planning area, the same school districts, the same medical and recreational resources or the same geographical area. Canaan is in SAU 62 but all of the towns people in the district are not in the same school district. Canaan and Wentworth use different services and does not share a geographical area. He believes this district violates article 9 of the constitution. The representative from Grafton

District 9 has to win votes from just over 4,000 people, but the representative from Grafton District 16, Canaan's floterial district, has to campaign and win votes within an area with over 10,000 people. This is not fair to the people or the representatives. A way to solve the problem is to give Canaan its own district and let Enfield can keep its own and the other 3 towns can combine to have a district with common interests.

Katherine Mulholland – She was a rep for a floterial district and it was a nightmare. She believes they should eliminate all of them. She found it very hard to represent her district especially within the school districts. The school districts are what brings the people together.

Jean Townsend – In 2001 the republican controlled redistricting process gave them a very nice district with 5 contiguous towns. If they did what Mr. Townsend said, one representative for Canaan, one for Enfield and one for the 3 other towns, it would be recreating this same district. They have so much in common and share things together. The representatives knew people and had connections. The way it was done in 2011 changed all of that. Enfield with a population of 4,400 has two representatives, and Grafton with a population of 1,300, has three representatives because of the way the districts were divided up. Also, someone who represents Enfield has 4,400 constituents but the floterial district rep has 10,000 people to represent.

David Andrews – Open Democracy He believes that Hampton is the only town in Congressional District 1 and it should be in Congressional District 2 with the rest of Grafton County. The most difficult part of redistricting is calculating the floterials. The best he could do with the current methodology in Grafton county, left three towns without their own representative. With the Alternative Component Method that he developed it would allow all the towns that were eligible to have their own districts to have them. He asked again that the committee would consider the Alternative Component Method for calculating floterials.

Senator Prentiss – Lebanon – They are here for the granite staters so that maps are drawn fair. Public hearings should have access for those that cannot travel or are sick. The websites that you can get redistricting information should be publicized more so that it is easier for people to find. The rational used for the drawing the maps should be made clear to the public and an opportunity given to them for input. Common interests, population numbers and diversity should be considered as well as social compacts. The Canaan farmers market is one of the most popular places that neighbors get together. She wants to join the voices that advocate for a representative for the town of Canaan.

Rep. Mary Phillips –The Hanover warrant article resolved that this process should be fair and not favor political parties or candidates. Proper notice should be

given at least ten days before the next meeting. Access to public hearings should be made available to those that cannot be here can contribute testimony. She implored them to incorporate the findings from the public into their maps. She would like them to give the public more than 24 hours' notice when the draft maps are drawn and to issue a report explaining the methodology they used. They should avoid packing districts and cracking towns apart as this robs constituents of their true representatives. These districts should reflect common communities of interest. The Congressional Districts should remain competitive districts and any shifts should remain largely the same as not much has changed. The committee should let the US Supreme Court be their guiding light, one person one vote. The equal protection clause can be used for potential litigation which is a great cost to the taxpayers. In 2010 NH scored very low in the redistricting process because it was hidden from public view and expensive litigation followed. When there is an increase in transparency there is a drop in litigation. Her last concern is gerrymandering. It only causes division divides and the majority of Americans agree that gerrymandering is wrong. It divides communities from their natural commonalities. At a time when voter confidence is at an all-time low, she encouraged the committee to avoid gerrymandering and draw fair districts.

Ingrid Curtis – This committee has a tremendous opportunity to improve the partisan politics that they have gotten into. All voters are unhappy with the increased partisan politics in the country. Common sense would say that they could help with that. Making decisions based on anything but fairness and transparency would harm the state of NH

Meeting Adjourned – 7:27 p.m.