

RE: HB 52 and HB 50

Dear Committee Chair Gray and Members of the NH Senate Election Law and Municipal Affairs Committee:

I am a resident of Canaan and a pastor serving within the United Church of Christ, the largest Protestant denomination in New Hampshire. As I look at the proposed electoral districts maps presented to you as part of HB 52 and HB 50, I view these through a moral lens as well as a “what’s really in the best interests of New Hampshire” lens.

The Immorality of the Proposed CD 2

I have to believe that all members of the Election Law Committee know, somewhere in your conscience, that the redrawn Congressional District maps presented to you in HB 52 simply don’t pass the moral test. They certainly pass a crass partisanship test, but not a “what’s in the best interests of NH test.” Even Governor Sununu has said publicly that “*at first blush*” a district boundary should “*make general sense*” with no “*twisting around here or there. Whatever we do has to be fair, it has to be balanced.*” So, as you look at the indefensibly drawn, clearly gerrymandered CD 2, it ought to be apparent to the full Committee that the boundary lines now proposed for CD 2 (my own district) don’t even pass “the Sununu test!”

The HB 52 proposed lines could now be used as a dictionary definition for partisan gerrymandering. For example, making sure those pesky (to one Party) towns of Hanover and Durham somehow get lumped into the same district, flies in the face of over a century of CD line drawing in which the boundaries have stayed roughly the same – with lines generally tweaked based on population adjustments, not partisan games.

Using the moral lens again, it is clear that the HB 52 proposal is NOT good for New Hampshire. Nonpartisan political science analyses tell us that crassly gerrymandered districts do severe damage to voter engagement and community cohesion. By ensuring that a district is NOT competitive, voter interest is suppressed, and an incumbent in such a district knows that he/she need only to pay attention to the voters in the next Party Primary, not the entirety of the district population. So, I implore you to reject this proposal and go back to the drawing board to create a district that is “fair and balanced” and maintains the electoral competitiveness that is essential for a healthy democracy. And you do not need to start from scratch. There are nonpartisan proposals already out there to show you what moral CD redistricting looks like.

The Town of Canaan Again Experiences an Unconstitutional Representative District

On the matter of HB 50, while I applaud the Special Committee on Redistricting for traveling statewide to hold county-based hearings, actual listening seemed lacking. For example, despite the fervent pleas of officials from my own town of Canaan for the Committee to follow the constitutional mandate that Canaan should have its own Representative, we again find our community in two proposed multi-town districts – one of which is a bizarre floterial district, seemingly as geographically spread out as a rural Senate district. It was and still is possible to follow the Constitution for Canaan and other towns, and I strongly urge your Committee to do so.

Clearly, the contents of HB 52 and 50 need work. Please, for the sake of the democratic health of our State overall, be the adults in the Legislative room and fix what is obviously broken – and damaging to New Hampshire – in what currently appears before you in these two redistricting bills.

Sincerely,

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