

Dear Chairman Gray, and Senators Birdsell, Ward, Soucy, and Perkins Kwoka,

Please accept this written testimony in opposition to Senate Bills 240 and 241.

In the case of both bills, no clear statement has been given as to the criteria used in determining districts for Executive Council or for the Senate.

Districts are not compact; 35 high school SAUs have been split; has there been any effort to respect “communities of interest”? For both Executive Council and Senate maps, it seems the only determination made was to create the least competition possible.

Districts are either packed with more Republicans, or with more Democrats – so that no candidate need fear real competition from the opposing party.

In the 2020 presidential election, New Hampshire voted 49.8% Democrat and 50.2% Republican. Our population is almost evenly divided, and so we should expect lively competition between candidates, and lively debate of the principles we choose for our governance.

But with 15 Senate districts now favoring Republicans and 9 favoring Democrats, voters of both parties may become apathetic, assuming their vote will have little impact. The changes made, from the 2011 maps to the 2021 Senate maps, all involve making each district less competitive, giving greater dominance to one party. Districts 8 and 9 are visibly “snaky.” This is even more the case with 4 Republican-packed Executive Council districts to the 1 snake-like Democrat-packed district. On NHPR, Governor Sununu admitted that the 2011 Executive Council map, with its snake-like District 2, is clearly, visibly gerrymandered. He promised to veto any map that was so clearly unbalanced. And yet the 2021 Executive Council map has made no changes!

Instead of 49.8% to 50.2%, reflecting our population, New Hampshire will have governing districts of 15 to 9, and 4 to 1.

This “safety” for candidates means debate has no real importance. Ideas do not get scrutinized, candidates do not get vetted, and voters realize their votes have less impact. Less voter engagement, no competition between Democrat and Republican candidates, less competition of ideas – this is a formula for a decline in democratic values. And once a candidate has been elected, there is less reason to listen to constituent concerns.

The only true competition that can be expected--when districts have a clearly dominant party--is the competition in the primaries between mainstream and extreme candidates. We can expect greater polarization, more leaders elected from either the extreme right or extreme left. We will have less and less possibility of collaboration or compromise.

SB 240 and SB 241 would not be good for New Hampshire, and I urge you to vote them down, or amend them to make our Senate and Executive Council districts competitive.

Thank you for your consideration,

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