

# SENATE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON REDISTRICTING

## Hillsborough County Community Input Session

October 18, 2021

### Meeting Minutes

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

Representative Griffin explained that while they are in this facility neither the Courts of NH or the County Commissioners of Hillsborough 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. Wayne MacDonald, Rep. Marjorie Smith, Rep. Lucy Webber, Rep. Barbara Griffin, Rep. Bob Lynn, Rep. Paul Bergeron, Rep. Len Turcotte, Rep. Israel Piedra, Rep. Matt Wilhelm, and Rep. Ross Barry.

Senator Gray recognized former Senator Melanie Levesque, 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. Senator Birdsell, Senator Soucy and Senator Perkins Kwoka introduced themselves.

Representative Griffin recognized the death of General Colin Powell and asked for a moment of silence. She 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 to access 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. The districts that will be redrawn in New Hampshire will be, State Senate, State Representatives, Executive Council, County Commissioner

## Testimony

**David Hennessey – Pelham** He lives in House District 37 which consists of two towns Pelham and Hudson with a total number of voters, according to the last census, of 40,000. They choose eleven State Representatives. From his town of Pelham only two of those representatives live in Pelham and it has been that way for twenty years. They are not asking for anything drastic only that they would separate these two towns that are very different. This is not a partisan appeal as both towns are heavily crimson and this separation will not change the power in the Concord. They would just like to have their State Representatives living among them. People that they see in the grocery stores, going to the churches and getting involved in the community. They have a Senate District that represents three Rockingham County towns and one Hillsborough County town, theirs. There Executive Councilor lives in Rye which is far from Pelham and the district looks like a salamander. It is the perfect example of gerrymandering. They would like their Senator and Councilor to be from Hillsborough County.

**Jessica Grill – Bedford** She believes a free democracy is essential to securing all other freedoms that we enjoy as Americans. Every vote must count and all voters must be represented fairly. It is critical that New Hampshire's district maps accurately reflect the population. Strong, fair maps will ensure it is the people that control elections, not Super PACs or big corporations. She would like NH residents to be able to comment on the draft maps but feels that with only thirty days left and no idea when the maps will be available to the public, there is not enough time. This lack of transparency is disappointing to her and she feels only increases the division and lack of trust between citizens and elected officials. She asked that the committee members commit to release the maps to the public at least two weeks before the final vote. She also asked that they schedule at least four additional meetings for the public to ask questions and give feedback. She also believes the meetings should be made accessible to all NH residents via remote access.

**William Maddocks – Amherst** – He believes people who are at home should have remote access as well. Amherst was among 74 towns, who voted in favor of having a fair redistricting process. People are sick and tired of unfair maps and gerrymandering. He emphasized that voters stood out in the cold to collect signatures and worked hard all over the state because they want fair and non-partisan voting districts. They understand that these warrant articles are non-binding but they express the will of the people whom they represent. The House Redistricting Committee should set a schedule for when the maps will be released with at least two weeks for the public to review and give input. They should commit to scheduling four meetings for the public to ask questions.

**Former Senator Melanie Levesque – Brookline** The act of redistricting every ten years is meant to account for fluctuations in populations for the purpose of accurate representation. She is here to ask that they draw the maps fairly and to show her fellow citizens that this is not supposed to be a political process. She believes a very real side effect of drawing the districts to favor one party over another is in the education system. Between the three towns of Nashua, Hollis and Brookline there are over 13,000 public school students. Almost 11,000 of these students rely on the Nashua public school system. Hollis and Brookline have some of the top public schools in the state and they value them. There are only over 2,000 students in the remaining four towns of Senate District 12. She wonders why four towns with only 2,000 students override three towns with 13,000 students. When lines are drawn to give an unfair advantage to one party over another it only widens the divide between them and results in more extreme primaries and more extreme policies. She believes the people of NH should be concerned after hearing Steven Stepanek state that he could guarantee a Congressional Seat for the republicans because they controlled redistricting. She asked that this committee clearly demonstrate that maps are being drawn for a specific purpose of serving the people and not the politicians. She added that with only thirty days until the maps must be voted on, the public has no idea when they will be able to review them or if they will be able to comment on them. She asked that committee leadership recommend to leadership that there should be remote access for public participation in future hearings.

**Kate Marquis – Manchester** She lives in Ward 9 in Manchester and their flatorial district is Wards 8 & 9 and Litchfield. She has lived in Manchester for many years and has never been to Litchfield. She commented on the population, financial and educational differences between Manchester and Litchfield. She does not understand how the needs of either are being met with their representation. She asked that the committee please consider that in this process.

**Bev Cotton – Weare** She encouraged the committee to ask the House Speaker and the Senate President to build a more inclusive environment for people that cannot come out. Her voice is heard because she is here. She would like them to think about doing things a better way than the way things have been done in the past. Please consider commonalities in communities. Weare and Deering share a district and they have nothing in common. She also asked if they would publicize the criteria that they are using to create the maps. She does not see a clear outline of the criteria that they are using to draw the maps. She understands they are using a software program that was developed but that does not explain the process. There is a lack of transparency in that. She wants them to favor fairness, common sense and the true spirit of the task at hand. Democracy is a precious and fragile thing and she would like to think that this committee can restore it a little bit. She would like

the opportunity to offer an opinion, concern, or congratulations once the maps are drawn.

**Linda Bundy – Antrim** This is the first time that she has followed the process of redistricting closely. So far, the current process is more open than the description she has heard of from previous years. She participated in the Map-a-Thon Citizen-Drawn Mapping Project by submitting data for her town of Antrim and doing a telephone survey of 10 towns in Hillsborough County to determine their shared services. She learned how essential it is to consider communities of interest such as school districts, shared services, and common issues in addition to population. She encouraged the members of both committees and the public to look at these maps. Specifically speaking about Antrim, its close ties with Bennington are significant. Many residents from both towns are employed by Monadnock Paper Mills. They have a shared water and sewer department. Their children attend the same middle school. Bennington children participate in Antrim Recreation teams and activities. Even the food pantry is a combined effort. Antrim and Bennington should also share districts. In the New Hampshire House, Antrim is in District 1 with Hillsborough and Windsor, while Bennington is in District 3 with Hancock and Greenfield. It would make sense to have Antrim and Bennington together with other nearby towns in the ConVal School District. Deering is in District 2 with Weare and District 39 with Goffstown and Weare but has much more in common with Hillsborough. Floterial District 38 includes Antrim and Bennington along with 8 other towns, extending south through Lyndeborough, Wilton, and Greenville. This district should be more compact. Their Senate District 8 is also spread out and would benefit from greater compactness. When these first listening sessions are complete, she asked that the committee continue to have an open process which will explain what criteria they will consider in addition to the mathematics of population. She asked that when the maps are drawn they would be released to the public for review before they are finalized, that they hold a second round of listening sessions in each county to hear feedback from the public, and lastly, have the option of remote participation for those that cannot attend in person.

**Joseph Rogers – Lyndeborough** He would like them to consider where we are as a democracy. His opinion is that our democracy is failing and people are losing faith that their voices will be heard. He believes his District 38 is a mess. This work is very important and is not a partisan process. The goal should be to support democracy and not tear it down.

**Susan Shamel – Hillsborough** Her town was one of the towns that passed a warrant article in March of 2020 asking for fair redistricting. Gerrymandering happens in every state. Her town administrator sent letters to all of their representatives letting them know about the passage of the warrant article. It was a lot of work to get this done for the 6,000 people of Hillsborough. She feels like it is

going to be a waste of time and she asked the committee to not let that happen. She is angry that there was a need to get those signatures, and to put out all of that work. She does not think they should have had to drive from Hillsborough to ask them to conduct fair redistricting as it should be a no brainer. She asked that the criteria they plug in to the computer be fairness not partisanship.

In response to continued clapping **Rep. Griffin** stated that they have staff with them from the state house and there is no applause allowed in the Senate Chamber. In the House it is a little harder to control with 400 members instead of 24 but she asked that they respect the Senate rules.

**Dion Lewis – Amherst** He is concerned when he hears that our republican Governor has to threaten a veto of maps that do not pass the smell test. When people lose faith and feel that the system is rigged our democracy suffers. He asked that they put aside any personal preferences and Steven Stepanek's thirst for power through redistricting. He believes we should all hold our leadership accountable. He asked that they draw the lines in ways that serve our communities.

**Goley Santana - Nashua** These maps will directly impact our communities and our generations future but they still know very little about how they will be drawn or if they will be able to see them. The U.S. census shows that the Hispanic communities are growing and she believes they should be represented. She asked that as leaders they should set an example for future generations and do things that are considered fair instead of favoring one party or another.

**Emily Olson – Goffstown** The effects of this redistricting will last for ten years affecting young New Hampshire citizens ready to start the next chapter of their lives. She will not raise a family or have a life in a place where her voice is not heard. She believes the public should have a voice throughout the process so she is asking this committee to commit to holding at least one, highly advertised, hearing for public comment after the maps are drawn. This hearing should be posted at least a week in advance and have virtual access. A platform that allows virtual testimony such as Zoom would be preferable. She asked that the criteria be made public and transparent. She demanded that the committee follows the constitution criteria and draw fair maps with out gerrymandering. She is angry that she has to fight for fair redistricting.

In response to more clapping **Representative Griffin** stated that if it continues they will ask staff to remove those clapping from the room. **Senator Gray** commented that if those in the audience would like to express an opinion they should come up to the microphone and asked them to please be respectful.

**Representative Griffin** added that they are conducting business under the rules of the House and the Senate. The General Court meets for hearings on bills routinely in Concord and they thank Goffstown for allowing them to use this

facility. They have been to every County and have conducted all of the meetings according to the rules of the House and the Senate and she appreciates everyone in attendance following them.

**Christine Fajardo - Manchester** She is in support of a transparent redistricting process that is equally accessed by all constituents. During her last campaign she met a man who purposely disengages from the electoral process because in the last few years, he had become disillusioned with the state of our government and politics at all levels. She explained that this man did not feel like his vote counted any longer. She encouraged the committee to think of people like this man when they are redistricting and remember that gerrymandering only produces disengaged citizens who do not trust their elected officials. They have the power by choosing a process that is fair, transparent and accessible by all to restore the faith of so many.

In response to more clapping **Representative Griffin** commented that she is from Goffstown and is very disappointed that more than any other county hearing this one has had the most deliberate reactionary outbursts.

A man in the crowd yelled “this could get a lot worse, there could be an uprising now.” As he continued yelling, **Senator Gray** called for security to remove the man from the room. The man then left the meeting.

**Representative Griffin** stated that we show respect for all speakers to not have more of a reaction for some than for others. It is hard to get up and speak your opinion at a microphone in a crowded room and she asked again for all present to show respect by not clapping.

**Marie Morgan – Goffstown** She agrees with all of the speakers before her. She went over the populations of the towns in the County and the number of representatives allotted to them. She believes there is something wrong when the little town of Windsor has four representatives but the larger town of Peterborough has only two representatives. Milford has five representatives and the smaller town of Pelham has eleven. She commented that the maps are a mess.

**Former Senator Shannon Chandley – Amherst** During her time in the legislature the drawing of fair voting maps was always a priority. Both the House and the Senate passed, with a bipartisan majority, independent redistricting bills. HB 706 of 2019 was an excellent bill and she called their attention to the section in that bill called redistricting criteria. She believes that if they use that criteria as their guiding principle, they will have fair maps. It follows the basic criteria from the constitution but also adds that districts shall follow a single boundary and not be bisected. Districts shall be drawn in compact shapes and the committee shall take into consideration communities of interest as much as possible. She added that

the next section of the bill states that no redistricting process should favor or disfavor a specific political party, language group or racial group.

**Louise Spencer – Merrimack County** There is value in speaking in person. People want a fair and nonpartisan process. They would like to see the maps before the November 18<sup>th</sup> deadline and have an opportunity to comment on them. Public access should include a remote option.

**Rep. Kat McGee** – She believes concern from the public comes from the fact that the criteria for drawing the maps has not been published. She was disappointed when the fair redistricting bills that passed were vetoed. An independent committee has less chance of putting politics before the people. She has some experience in a floterial district and in her opinion it is better to have representatives that live in the towns they represent and have things in common with.

**Bonnie Bruno – Hollis** She agrees with all the speakers before her. She wants her vote and all other granite stater's votes to count. She does not want their votes packed, cracked or gerrymandered. They are responsible for meeting the will of the New Hampshire voters that overwhelmingly voted for a fair, non-partisan, redistricting process.

**Fred Mayer – Hudson** He is concerned because there were no maps to review before this hearing. This does not give him an opportunity to either agree or disagree. His request is, if in the interest of having a fair process, they could have hearings after the maps are drawn and that there is remote participation.

**Lucas Meyer – Manchester** There is a need for a timetable of when the maps will be released. With only 30 days left before the deadline, there will not be a lot of time for the public to review the maps and make plans to attend a hearing.

**David Erikson – Weare** – He asked that they listen to the input of the public and incorporate it into their decisions. He believes with the population of Weare they should have their own representative. If possible he would like to see the draft maps once they are drawn. If the districts are drawn unfairly there will be lawsuits. It would save a lot of time if the districts were drawn fair and reasonable from the start.

**Rolf Vanbibber – Amherst** His town of Amherst is districted with Bedford to the north despite most of the population being centered in the southern part of the town. They are also in a district with Mount Vernon which makes sense because they share a school. He believes they should have public meetings after the maps are drawn so they can comment on something that exists.

**Barbara Schult - Goffstown** She has four requests for the committees.

- 1). Make their criteria for drawing the maps available to the public. Transparency is key for the electorate to be assured the maps are fairly drawn.
- 2). Once the maps are ready, a second round of public hearings are necessary so that the citizens can provide input, once they have seen the maps actually drawn. This is a significant and vital step to the process. In addition, provide ample time for the public to digest and understand the maps before notice of the public hearing to receive input on these drawn maps.
- 3). Special attention to the Executive Council districts is needed before they are redrawn, especially concerning District 2, and careful study must be made to the new maps so that the districts are balanced and fair.
- 4). Goffstown currently has a NH House flotalial district representing Goffstown, Weare, and Deering. They (Goffstown) have no connection or affiliation (i.e.. shared schools, sports etc.) with Weare or Deering. She asked that they look at this flotalial district and reconsider the inclusion of these unrelated towns, especially Deering, which might more appropriately be linked to the town of Hillsboro. It is quite a stretch for a representative to live in Deering and be able to talk with constituents in Goffstown (or vice versa).

**Jon Cross – Brookline** He hopes they will receive their own House District. He got involved with the map-a-thon effort last year put on by Open Democracy. As part of that effort, they came up with a list of common communities of interest. Some of those on the list are high schools, SAUs, shared water and sewer and shared fire and police. They also created an analysis tool to tell if Counties have been split with the intent of analyzing the maps of 2010 and the 2020 maps. All of this work has been done to make transparency a priority. He asked the committee to have remote access in future meetings.

**Betty Vaughan – Litchfield** She is concerned about the Executive Council Districts and would like non-partisan maps.

**Rep. Maria Perez** – The most important thing is to represent the people that put them in office. She does not see party she just sees her constituents. The maps should be drawn with fairness in mind so that every voter has a voice. She believes it is important to have representatives with common interests in the community, living among the people. The Hispanic community should have representatives in the community. The disabled community reach out to her with their concerns. It is important to have remote access so everyone can participate.