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Governor decides state redistricting commission will continue its work

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As voters went to the polls this week to elect a new Congress, Gov. Larry Hogan amended an executive order to extend the work of a bipartisan redistricting commission.

On Monday, Hogan (R) amended an early executive order to extend the work of the Maryland Redistricting Reform Commission until Nov. 8, 2017.

New Market resident Walter Olson served as co-chairman for the commission's first year of work. Olson said he's not sure whether Hogan will change membership of the board for the new year, but several commission members wanted to continue their work at a meeting last week.

"We've got more to say," Olson said.

With an additional year of work, the commission can examine additional ideas for more representative congressional districts, Olson said. They would also likely hold public hearings in Montgomery County, which some lawmakers in Annapolis said was an egregious oversight in the commission's first year of work, he said.

Olson chalked up the lack of an earlier meeting in Montgomery County to "ill fortune and lack of time."

The commission was appointed in August 2015 and issued its final report that November, before the 2016 General Assembly convened.

During last year's session, half a dozen bills aimed at reforming the redistricting process, including one that Hogan proposed, failed.

A federal lawsuit challenging the state's current redistricting map remains pending in federal court. That map, created by Gov. Martin O'Malley's administration, was allowed to take effect in 2012 without any changes from the Democratic-controlled Legislature.

At that time, Frederick County was split as part of a shift that made the 6th District more Democratic. The Democratic-oriented city of Frederick is part of the reworked 6th District, which also picked up part of the heavily Democratic Montgomery County. Other parts of Frederick County were moved to the 8th District.

Seven of Maryland's eight seats in Congress are held by Democrats. With Democrat Jamie Raskin taking over the 8th District seat held by Chris Van Hollen, Democrats retained seven seats in this week's election.

The party holds a 2-to-1 majority among registered voters in Maryland.

Seventy-five percent of Maryland residents support shifting redistricting from politicians to an independent commission, according to a February Goucher Poll.