



Two members of Hogan's redistricting commission resign after failing to meet requirements for panel

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Two members of Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan's redistricting commission resigned after The Baltimore Sun asked questions about whether their participation in the body redrawing Maryland's congressional districts violated state rules.

The move came as the commission voted unanimously Friday to adopt a proposed map for the 6th Congressional District, which stretches from Montgomery County to Western Maryland. A federal court ruled in November that Maryland Democrats unconstitutionally gerrymandered that district in 2011 to benefit their party, prompting Hogan to appoint the emergency commission.

Amelia Chasse, a spokeswoman for Hogan, acknowledged Friday that the two members were in violation of some provisions of the governor's executive order creating the commission.

"The co-chairs of the Emergency Commission on 6th Congressional District Gerrymandering have accepted the resignations of two members," Chasse said in a statement.

"The remaining seven commission members, who constitute the quorum required by the governor's executive order, will continue the commission's important work by engaging in a public comment process on the draft map that was submitted to the public today," she said.

When Hogan created the commission, his executive order stated that no lobbyists — past or present — could participate. The order also stated that commission members, all of them volunteers, had to be registered voters in the state of Maryland for at least three years.

Commission member Kathleen Jo Parsons Tabor, a lawyer from Eklridge, registered in 2014 as a lobbyist in Maryland.

Fellow commission member Matthew Lee Douglas, a policy analyst from Montgomery County, registered to vote last year in Maryland, after previously voting in Washington, D.C.

Hogan appointed them to represent unaffiliated voters on the commission.

The Sun asked Thursday whether their participation complied with the rules of the commission.

“It was called to our attention this morning that two registered unaffiliated volunteer members of the Emergency Commission on 6th District Gerrymandering do not meet all the requirements laid out in Governor Hogan’s executive order creating the commission,” commission co-chairs Alexander Williams, Walter Olson and Ashley Oleson wrote in a statement.

“Commissioners Matthew Douglas and Kathleen Tabor immediately offered their resignations, which we have accepted.”

The commission chairs wrote that they hold Douglas and Tabor in esteem.

“We have found Mr. Douglas and Ms. Tabor to be fair-minded individuals who are committed to good government and a better redistricting process,” they wrote. “At the same time, making sure we comply with the language of the governor’s executive order is vital to our work.”

Looming over the commission’s work is a federal lawsuit advancing to the nation’s highest court. The U.S. Supreme Court plans to hear March 26 the appeal of the high-profile case alleging unconstitutional partisan gerrymandering in Maryland’s redistricting process.

Maryland Attorney General Brian Frosh sought a high court review of the case in November after a panel of federal judges threw out the state’s map for the 6th District. The judges said Democratic state officials unconstitutionally drew the district’s boundaries with a goal of diminishing Republican influence. They ordered a new map drawn by March 7, but that deadline is on hold pending a Supreme Court decision.

Hogan’s commission voted Friday to endorse a map submitted by a member of the public. It would add population from Frederick County to the 6th District, while moving population from the current 6th District area of Montgomery County to the 8th District. The changes would affect only those two of Maryland’s eight congressional districts.

“At last week’s workshop, the commission reached a consensus that a map that was minimally invasive to other districts was likeliest to satisfy the court order, as well as the governor’s executive order,” Olson said.

Del. Kirill Reznik, a Montgomery County Democrat who favors a multi-state redistricting compact, took issue with the commission’s work. He said the panel was formed in a rush and did not use demographers or data scientists to create a map.

“Any actions by this commission are called into question,” Reznik said. “Clearly, the governor made no effort to actually vet these people.”

Reznik added that two of the Republicans on the commission have donated to Amie Hoeber, who ran unsuccessfully last year in the 6th District.

“The governor’s only interest is to add Republican members to the House of Representatives,” he argued.

But Chasse said both Republicans and Democrats on the commission have made campaign donations — and those do not affect their standing on the body.

“Political parties have equal representation on the commission, and the executive order prohibits any member from taking any action to benefit a candidate or officeholder, which would be subject for removal and nonacceptance of a resulting map,” she said.

Damon Effingham, director of Common Cause Maryland, said he would prefer a system for commission appointments with stronger background checks and more apolitical appointees, but he understood the urgency of situation.

“We want a broad representation of people that are selected in a blind or unbiased manner,” he said. “This commission was thrown together as an emergency commission.”