



Concerns aired over 6th District boundaries: Gerrymandering commission hears comments during ACM public hearing

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CUMBERLAND — Western Maryland residents attending a public hearing on the redrawing of boundaries for the 6th Congressional District told commission members Wednesday they believe the current map is unfair and the area lacks access to representatives.

Gov. Larry Hogan established the Emergency Commission on Sixth Congressional District Gerrymandering and appointed nine members to serve on the panel.

About 50 people attended the hearing at Allegany College of Maryland and all nine panel members were present. The commission consists of Kathleen Tabor, Maury Epner, Luis Guitierrez, Ashley Oleson, Matthew Douglas and Deborah Lundahl with Walter Olson and Alexander Williams Jr. serving as co-chairs. All the panelists are from the central Maryland region.

"Our charge is specific," Williams said. "It was emergency legislation introduced and enacted by Governor Hogan to get your comments and help us come up with a map that is legal and fair. We are here to take notes and to hear from you.

"I want to assure you this panel of nine commissioners, we are totally nonpartisan. We were selected from persons who had no interests and affiliations," Williams said. "There are three Republicans, three Democrats and three registered Independents."

Olson said the commission will deliver a final suggested map to Hogan's office April 2 so it can be reviewed for consideration by the attorney general's office and the Maryland General Assembly.

Issues arose with the 6th District when the boundaries were reconfigured in 2011 under the administration of Gov. Martin O'Malley.

Prior to 2011, the district was made up Garrett, Allegany, Washington, Frederick, Carroll and northern portions of Baltimore and Harford counties, plus a small piece of the northeast corner of Montgomery County. Largely rural areas, the district typically voted Republican.

In 2011, the district was changed to include Garrett, Allegany, Washington and southwestern Frederick County, including Frederick city. In addition, a large portion of western Montgomery County was added, including the cities of Clarksburg, Germantown, Gaithersburg and Poolesville.

Following the reconfiguration, the 6th District has voted Democrat with U.S. Reps. John Delaney and David Trone winning election.

Commission members said the aim is to have each district consist of roughly 721,000 inhabitants.

Fourteen people stepped to the microphone to make comments at the hearing.

"We feel like we are getting really violated for a number of years," said Gary Riddell of Oakland. "We used to have continuous counties; we don't all think alike but we are more of a rural area ... some pockets of cities. It was much more homogenous than when we were broken apart and Montgomery County was inserted in us."

Riddell suggested the map be configured back to the pre-2011 boundaries.

"Everyone knows the map is unfair and it was done for political reasons," said Jake Shade, Allegany County commissioner. "Gov. O'Malley said in his deposition; it was done for political reasons. It's no secret.

"I've been in office almost five years. I can count on one hand the number of times we got to see (Delaney) out here locally. Congressman Bartlett had an office here; Delaney did not. It has an impact on the amount of constituent service."

Howard Gorrell and Bob Spear offered specific geographic suggestions on how to create a new map that would achieve the population numbers required without using large portions of Montgomery County.

Others citizens providing comments included William Stookey, Jackie Sams, Richard Edgar, Mary Jo Wolters, Tiffany Mock, John Yazstremski, Joy Kroeger-Mathis and Eva Furette.

Furette was not in favor of returning the boundaries to the pre-2011 map.

"When you look at the old map, and you're talking about people having local offices so we could access them ... I suspect it was a little difficult for the people of Harford (County) to access the office in Garrett (County)," Furette said.

"You can't create a map with an office in every single community, I would think," Furette said. "I like the idea of keeping communities together. When I look at the old map, I wonder if the folks over (around Harford County) felt represented. So, I hope it is not just putting rural areas together. We have cities, they may not be Baltimore, but we do have cities with some comparable problems."