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## Hogan creates emergency commission to deal with ‘embarrassment’ of gerrymandered congressional districts

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Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan (R) on Monday created an “emergency” commission to redraw the controversial boundaries of Western Maryland’s congressional district, saying he was acting without Democrats to cut politics out of the mapmaking process.

Hogan said his nine-member commission would adjust the boundaries of the 6th District, which are the focus of a gerrymandering case pending before the Supreme Court.

Maryland is one of three states whose maps are so contorted by partisan intent that judges have declared them illegal. This month, a panel of federal judges gave the state until March 7 to come up with a new map that fixes the 6th District, but Maryland Attorney General Brian E. Frosh (D) appealed the ruling to the Supreme Court.

Hogan on Monday said his commission will comply with the appeals court ruling, calling the situation “an embarrassment to our state.”

“Unfortunately and inexplicably, Maryland’s Attorney General Brian Frosh . . . continues to be on the wrong side of this fight and on the wrong side of history,” the governor said.

It is unclear whether the map drawn by Hogan’s commission will ever be used. It requires approval from the General Assembly and may not be completed before the Supreme Court decides the case.

Maryland’s congressional boundaries have been widely criticized as overtly partisan and geographically unwieldy. The state’s sprawling districts rank among the most gerrymandered in the country.

For the past three years, Hogan has unsuccessfully pushed the Democratic majority in the General Assembly to let an independent commission — rather than state lawmakers — create new maps.

Democrats passed a measure that would take effect only if other states switched to independent commissions; Hogan vetoed it.

Meanwhile, leading Democrats have said that Maryland giving up partisan mapmaking is tantamount to unilateral disarmament, given that in 2010, the GOP controlled the mapmaking process in more than twice as many states as Democrats.

On Monday, Hogan called that argument a “red herring.”

He appointed three people — a former judge, a redistricting activist and a think tank expert — to lead his nonpartisan redistricting commission. The trio will pick six more members from the public, who can apply through a state [website](#).

Hogan’s [executive order](#) forbids the participation of state lawmakers, current and former lobbyists, and members of Congress.

The commission has until March 2 to draw new boundaries. Judges ruled that the current design violates the First Amendment rights of Republicans. Mapmakers in 2011 drew a line that swapped out tens of thousands of Republican voters for Democratic ones, tilting the electorate in a way that favors Democrats.

Hogan plans to submit the map to state lawmakers by April 2, a week before they adjourn for the year.

On Monday House Speaker Michael E. Busch (D-Anne Arundel) and Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller Jr. (D-Calvert), declined to comment on Hogan’s proposal, citing the ongoing litigation.

Hogan’s reelection this month set the stage for a protracted fight with Democrats over how, when and whether to end partisan gerrymandering in Maryland before the next round of mapmaking that follows the 2020 Census.

Under current law, the governor drafts maps for state lawmakers to consider, redraw and approve. While Hogan can veto the end product, Democrats hold supermajorities that can override him in both chambers of the legislature.

Hogan said Monday that he saw “tremendous pressure” on Democrats to alter how districts are drawn, and he vowed to introduce legislation on the first day of next year’s General Assembly session that would forever use an independent commission to draw the maps.

“I don’t have any magic ball to say people in the legislature can change their mind and finally do the right thing,” Hogan said. “We’re going to continue to push for an open and transparent process that comes up with fair districts.”

A [2017 poll by Goucher College](#) showed that 73 percent of Maryland residents prefer that an independent commission draws political boundaries. Nationally, public opinion has been shifting. In November, four states voted to take mapmaking power away from politicians, doubling the number of states with nonpartisan panels.

Hogan’s new committee will be co-chaired by former U.S. District judge Alexander Williams Jr., a Democrat, and Cato Institute fellow Walter Olson, a Republican.

Ashley Oleson, a registered independent who works for the League of Women Voters of Maryland, is the third member. She will help Williams and Olson select the remaining committee members: two Democrats, two Republicans and two independents.