Fair Maps Maryland calls for nonpartisan redistricting to end gerrymandering

Marcus Dieterle

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A new advocacy group with strong ties to Gov. Larry Hogan has been launched to end gerrymandering in Maryland and support a nonpartisan redistricting process for the state.

Fair Maps Maryland intends to lobby state lawmakers to approve federal and state electoral maps drafted by a bi-partisan citizens commission formed by Republican Hogan via executive order in January.

Fair Maps Maryland spokesman Doug Mayer, who previously worked as a communications strategist in the Hogan administration, said in a statement that gerrymandering is "an undemocratic stain on our country and on the state of Maryland."

With Democrats in control of the General Assembly in Maryland, legislative maps have been drawn to favor their party. Where once the Maryland Congressional delegation was divided 4-4 between Democrats and Republicans, Democrats now hold a 7-1 advantage, and some Baltimore-area districts are considered the most gerrymandered in the nation.

Members of the governor's commission were finalized in April. It will be co-chaired by retired federal judge Alexander Williams (D), Howard Community College President Kathleen Hetherington (I), and Walter Olson (R), senior fellow at the Cato Institute's Robert A. Levy Center for Constitutional Studies.

The commission is tasked with creating a draft of new electoral maps. Still, the Democrat-controlled General Assembly can adopt whatever maps it chooses.

Maryland State Sen. James Brochin (D) and former Howard County Executive Allan Kittleman (R) are the first two members of the advocacy group's board of directors. Brochin crossed party

lines to endorse Hogan for governor in 2018; and Kittleman was defeated for re-election in 2018 and appointed by the governor to the State Worker's Compensation Commission.

In a minute-long video advertisement, Fair Maps Maryland lays out their case for ending gerrymandering. The video shows Maryland's 3rd Congressional District, which has been heavily gerrymandered to resemble "a crab squaring up to fight," "a pterodactyl with a broken wing," or "a Rorschach test," the group says.

A report from the nonprofit RepresentUs found that Maryland is among 27 states at the highest risk for gerrymandering.

In the Old Line State, those district lines have favored Democrats, who control both chambers of the state legislature with veto-proof majorities, and both U.S. Senate seats.

But nationally, gerrymandering has largely tipped the balance in favor of Republicans.

Maryland state lawmakers in 2017 passed legislation to create a nonpartisan redistricting process in Maryland if five surrounding states did the same, but Hogan vetoed the legislation.

Hogan at the time called the Democrat-backed effort "phony" and said Maryland would not wait for other states to act on nonpartisan redistricting.

"Gerrymandering not only attempts to silence political opponents, but it also discourages progress and innovation by preventing the free exchange of ideas and deepening political divisions," Brochin said in a statement. "I look forward to being part of Fair Maps Maryland and working hard so that every Marylander, in every corner of our state, can enjoy their right to free and fair elections."