

Maryland Gov. Hogan promises renewed push on redistricting rules

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Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan said Tuesday he will launch “a sustained effort” to push for a less-partisan process of redrawing political districts, an effort he has failed to get through the General Assembly for the past six years.

The Republican governor has made redistricting an issue since his first campaign as governor in 2014, and repeatedly introduced legislation that would set up a bipartisan process to draw boundaries for state legislators and members of Congress.

Hogan announced a commission Tuesday composed of Republicans, Democrats and unaffiliated voters that he will charge with recommending boundaries for the next round of redistricting. He named the three commission leaders: retired federal Judge Alexander Williams Jr., a Democrat; Walter Olson of the Cato Institute, a Republican; and Howard Community College President Kathleen Hetherington, an independent voter. Those three will appoint six other members to the commission.

Hogan said that “unfair” redistricting in Maryland has “made a mockery of the electoral system.”

Hogan's announcement comes as a **redrawing of the state's legislative and congressional map looms**. It was slated to occur upon completion of the 2020 U.S. Census.

The governor gets to propose both the General Assembly and congressional district maps. State lawmakers can substitute their own General Assembly map. To change a congressional map, they have to pass their own bill and possibly muster the three-fifths vote needed to override a veto.

Maryland's congressional districts, in particular, are considered among the most gerrymandered in the nation and have been the subject of court challenges. In one court case, a federal judge infamously described the 3rd District as "**reminiscent of a broken-winged pterodactyl, lying prostrate across the center of the state.**"

Democrats hold a 2-to-1 voter registration advantage over Republicans, but the eight-member U.S. House delegation includes just one Republican, Andy Harris. As recently as the early 2000s, Maryland had a 4-4 split between Democrats and Republicans.

In 2017, Democrats in the General Assembly passed a bill that would have required the state to use a nonpartisan redistricting process, but only if five surrounding states chose the same process. Hogan **vetoed that bill**, saying it was more of a "political ploy" than good-faith effort at changing redistricting.

Maryland Senate President Bill Ferguson said in a statement that Congress should pass national redistricting reform, something he said he hopes is likely with the incoming Democratic president and Democratic control of both houses.

"This year, Democrats in the legislature are focused on critical priorities including COVID relief, police reform, equity and looking out for the many needs of Marylanders," said Ferguson, a Baltimore Democrat. "This session isn't about political theatrics, and we hope the governor will join us in focusing on the priorities of Marylanders."