

# Carroll County Times

## Carroll/Frederick ties a topic of public hearing to redraw gerrymandered congressional district

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Carroll County used to be a part of Maryland's sixth congressional district until redistricting in 2011 split the county between the first and eighth districts. This year, the sixth district was judged unconstitutional and in violation of voter's first-amendment rights.

At a public hearing Monday, Jan. 14, citizens hoped the consequences of the decision would ripple out to reduce gerrymandering across the state.

The Governor's Emergency Redistricting Commission met at Frederick Community College for the first of three public hearings before they work to draw new boundaries for District 6.

Co-chair Walter Olson said that Congressional District 8, which includes a sizable section of the lower half of Carroll, if not others will be altered by the new District 6 boundary.

Congressional districts across the state will change following the 2020 census.

"Hopefully whatever we come up with and give to the governor, hopefully it will be a model that will assist the entire state when they start talking about creating districts in 2021 and 2022 and after," said co-chair Alex Williams.

District 6 is the only district that was included in the court case that led to it being declared unconstitutional, prompting Gov. Larry Hogan to issue an executive order that the district be redrawn before the 2020 election.

During the public hearing Monday, Carroll County Commissioner Eric Bouchat spoke in favor of combining Carroll and Frederick in the same congressional district.

"We like seeing our congressional representatives reflect the continuity of our communities, that we are rural," he said.

By linking southern Carroll County with a section of Montgomery County, he said, "it is nothing but an attempt to water down the rural representation that we should have in Congress."

John Snyder is a Frederick resident who urged that Carroll and Frederick be combined into one congressional district. He wanted to see a congressional district map similar to the one drawn in 2002.

"Carroll County and Frederick County are like two peas in a pod," he said during the public hearing. "The high school teams play together. They're in the same league. There's just a bond between the two counties. Now those poor people have to have Jamie Raskin represent them in the Congress. He's as close to a communist as you can get."

"So I feel sorry for people in Carroll County because they've been disenfranchised. I think it's important to put Carroll County and Frederick County together."

Hogan's executive order, which Olson quoted from as the committee's "marching orders," specified criteria for the new map: "compactness and geographical continuity and with regard to natural boundaries, boundaries of political subdivisions — like counties and cities — and geographical and other communities of interest, and without considering how citizens are registered to vote or have voted in the past, or to what political party they belong."

Jim Carpenter, a resident of the district for 43 years, focused his comments on algorithms that could be used to create maps according to measures of fair districting like contiguity and compactness.

"I'd like to see the whole state redistricted according to these unbiased algorithms," he said.

Olsen said Maryland is one of the most challenging states in the nation to find compactness and continuity because it is so split by bodies of water. He said software available through the state Department of Planning would allow the committee to evaluate suggested maps for measures like compactness.

He spoke with Dat Duthinh after the hearing and the two chewed over how best statistics and mathematics can be used to submit a map to the committee.

Although a formula can present a map based on one criterion like compactness or representativeness, Duthinh said the final map will have to find compromise between the criteria put before the committee.

He believes that a nonpartisan and unbiased mechanism should be agreed upon and used for the future creation of districts.

"Otherwise we have to go through this process every time there's a lawsuit," he said during the public hearing.

Before the meeting, Bouchat said he was very interested in the outcome of the pending *Benisek v. Lamone* case that will be heard by the U.S. Supreme Court. He hopes that case law will be redefined in a way that ensures congressional districts be drawn blind to political affiliation.

Others agreed that they wished to see gerrymandering eradicated on a large scale. "When you're talking about fixing what you've got to fix, that's not just a state problem, that's a national problem," said Andy Billotti, a District 8 resident.

Upcoming public hearings will be held in Montgomery County on Jan. 31 and Allegany County on Feb. 2.

The committee will approve a proposal plan March 4, which will be followed by further public hearings, to be announced. They will finalize the plan by March 26 and submit to the governor by April 2 before the end of session for the Maryland General Assembly.

The public will be able to submit electronic comments and suggestions for district maps through a website still in process of being set up.

The current congressional district maps are available at the [Maryland Department of Planning website](#).

More information about the federal judgment and the pending Supreme Court Case, Benisek v. Lamone, regarding the district is available through the [Brennan Center for Justice](#).

The full video of Monday's public hearing will be made available through [governor.maryland.gov](#).