



Maryland lawmakers begin to dig into process of drawing new electoral maps

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The Maryland Legislative Redistricting Advisory Commission held its first meeting Tuesday, promising a fair and transparent process as congressional and district lines are being redrawn following the 2020 census.

The latest census shows the state has a population of 6.2 million people, meaning that each of the eight congressional districts will consist of about 771,925 residents.

Senate Minority Leader Bryan Simonaire said he hoped the committee could come up with better maps than the ones drawn after the 2010 census, which he called “some of the worst maps in the nation.”

Simonaire asked if the map creation would be a bipartisan process.

“We’re not in the majority and don’t pretend to be there, but I would like to be included as opposed to Republicans going off and doing their maps, Democrats going off and doing their maps,” Simonaire said.

Karl Aro, former director of the Department of Legislative Services and chairman of the committee, said “I think the idea is to try and build a map that everybody can find a consensus around.”

Still, creating districts that meet the constitutional requirements and keep communities together is a challenge he compared to “doing brain surgery with a sledgehammer.”

House Speaker Adrienne Jones said despite the committee’s best efforts, “There’s a good chance these maps will end up in court. That’s the nature of redistricting.”

The first public meeting is scheduled for Sept. 20 in Prince George’s County. The hearings wrap up Nov. 5 in Montgomery County.

A separate redistricting commission created by Gov. Larry Hogan wrapped up a series of hearings in July. The Maryland Citizens Redistricting Commission, consisting of three Democrats, three Republican voters and three unaffiliated voters, is scheduled to hold another

round of hearings now that the census numbers have been released. Another round of public hearings is scheduled after the redistricting maps are drawn.

The committee is co-chaired by Judge Alexander Williams Jr., a retired judge for the U.S. District Court for the District of Maryland, Howard Community College President Dr. Kathleen Hetherington and Olson, senior fellow at the Cato Institute's Robert A. Levy Center for Constitutional Studies.

Hogan is expected to present maps drawn by the Citizens Redistricting Commission to the General Assembly.

Jones encouraged residents to attend the meetings and give their input.

"We're listening," she said.