



## **General Assembly Redistricting Commission Convenes First Meeting In Prince George's County**

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The Maryland General Assembly's redistricting commission convened its first public hearing in Prince George's County on Monday night, where residents urged commission members to keep communities whole in their proposed maps.

Ashanti Martinez, speaking on behalf of the immigrant rights group CASA, said Prince George's and Montgomery counties have the largest Latino and immigrant populations in the state. He said District 47B is the state's only majority-Latino subdistrict, and urged commission members to maintain the district's boundaries in their maps.

"District 47B has been an example of how when we're intentional regarding representation, we allow for diverse communities to not only have a voice, but also produce diverse leaders and leadership," Martinez said.

Richard Elliott, a Prince George's County resident, suggested that commission members could draw a majority-Latino Senate district. He also urged commission members to keep municipalities whole in congressional and legislative maps.

"Please keep our jurisdictions whole," Elliott said. "Please don't divide municipalities, and please use highways and ordinary natural boundaries and set districts."

Del. Geraldine Valentino-Smith (D-Prince George's) asked commission members to keep the University of Maryland College Park and Beltsville Agricultural Research Center as part of the state's 5th Congressional District because of how their research affects Southern Maryland. She also noted that the University of Maryland conducts unmanned aircraft research in St. Mary's County Regional Airport.

"Preserve the core of the current district, the continuity, and preserve the commonality of interest that exists with that in Congressional Districts 5," Valentino-Smith said.

Tracy Thompson, testifying on behalf of the Prince George's County League of Women Voters, said her organization will oppose any map that favors a particular political party or candidates until there has been "meaningful opportunity for the public to request revisions to eliminate such favoritism."

The Legislative Redistricting Advisory Commission was created by Senate President Bill Ferguson (D-Baltimore City) and House Speaker Adrienne A. Jones (D-Baltimore County) this summer to draw up congressional and legislative maps and is chaired by Karl Aro, the former executive director of the nonpartisan Department of Legislative Services.

Senate President Pro Tempore Melony Griffith (D-Prince George's), House Majority Leader Eric G. Luedtke (D-Montgomery), Senate Minority Leader Bryan W. Simonaire (R-Anne Arundel) and House Minority Leader Jason Buckel (R-Allegany) are members of the commission in addition to Aro, Jones and Ferguson.

A separate panel, the Maryland Citizens Redistricting Commission, was set up by Gov. Lawrence J. Hogan Jr. (R) earlier this year and is composed of three Democrats, three Republicans and three unaffiliated voters.

That commission hopes to make final decisions on a proposed congressional district map later this week, and finalize some regions in a proposed state senate district map, including the division of the city of Baltimore.

On Monday, the panel heard from lawmakers and residents in Southern Maryland, who opposed a draft map that divided St. Mary's County, which is currently contained in one state senate district, into two.

Del. Matthew Morgan (R), who represents northern parts of St. Mary's County said the commission's draft didn't take into account "the community needs and what this community actually is like down here."

Commission Co-Chair Walter Olson (R) said the commission received extensive testimony about the Southern Maryland districts after an email-writing campaign. "It's worth emphasizing that these are indeed draft and preliminary. They are not things that the commission has decided to do," he said.

During Monday's meeting, Gloria Aparicio Blackwell, the panel's adviser on Latino issues, echoed testimony given at the legislative commission hearing in Prince George's County, urging mapmakers to retain District 47B as a majority-Latino district.

The General Assembly, where Democrats hold a veto-proof majority in both the House and Senate, will have the final say over the state's next set of maps.