



Fair Districts New Jersey - Constitutional Amendment Proposal

Redistricting is a fundamental component of our democracy. Free and fair elections and fair and equal representation rely on fairly-drawn maps. As advocates for strengthening our democracy, the Fair Districts New Jersey coalition is proposing a more independent, representative legislative redistricting commission that minimizes partisanship, opens up each step of the process to the public, and establishes a set of clear line-drawing rules to guide redistricting commissioners. These rules would include checks against gerrymandering and protections for New Jersey's communities of color and communities of interest.

In addition to the proposed changes to the New Jersey Constitution, the coalition is also advocating for a complete and accurate 2020 Census and an end to the practice of prison-based gerrymandering – the discriminatory practice of counting incarcerated individuals at their prison address for redistricting purposes.

To achieve a transparent, inclusive and fairer redistricting process, the coalition is proposing the following:

- A 15-member commission that includes 5 members of the public chosen by a panel of former New Jersey Supreme Court Justices. Three of the 5 independent members must not be affiliated with either the Democratic or Republican party. The commission must reflect the racial, ethnic and gender diversity of the state.
- Expanded commissioner eligibility requirements to improve the independence of the commission. Elected officials, their staff, party leaders, political committee officers, and others whose participation in the legislative redistricting process may present a conflict of interest should not be permitted to serve on the commission.
- An open and transparent redistricting process that requires the commission to hold public hearings, broadcast meetings statewide, allow public submissions of maps, share drafts of maps publicly and issue reports justifying their work, among other requirements to make redistricting community-driven.
- A set of line-drawing criteria clearly outlined in order of priority, emphasizing people-centric, rather than partisan-centric standards. Commissioners must create a map that is in compliance with the U.S. Constitution and federal law, has contiguous boundary lines, reinforces the equity principles of the Voting Rights Act, preserves communities of interest within the same legislative district, and minimizes the division of municipalities and counties. To the extent practicable, after legal and community-driven standards are met, districts should be compact and politically-competitive.
- A restriction on the use of partisan and political data during the process to provide a check against gerrymandering and ensure that districts were not drawn to favor one political party over another.
- A process that fosters cooperation among commissioners, but also between commissioners and the general public. The final decision regarding a map that determines the political representation of New Jersey residents for the next ten years should not fall in the hands of a single person, as it currently does. At least nine of the fifteen commissioners should agree on a final map before it can be certified. Inability to reach agreement will trigger a failsafe mechanism that includes the involvement of a court-appointed special master.
- A system that permits voters to raise objections to the implementation of a new map on legal or constitutional grounds.

As the 2020 census approaches, the time is now to enact comprehensive and meaningful redistricting reforms in New Jersey.