

Milwaukee Ald. Johnson: Legislation on redistricting ballot issue moves forward

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Ald. Cavalier Johnson
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The Judiciary and Legislation Committee yesterday (Monday, September 16th) voted to recommend for approval legislation directing the executive director of the city Election Commission to place on the April 7, 2020, ballot a non-binding referendum asking voters whether the City of Milwaukee should request that the Wisconsin Legislature pass a law establishing a non-partisan procedure for drawing legislative district maps.

Following the 2010 United States Census, the Wisconsin Legislature established new legislative maps for the state (a process known as redistricting) and the partisan procedure by which the Legislature prepared new legislative maps in 2011 was controlled entirely by its Republican members.

Alderman Cavalier Johnson, the primary sponsor of the legislation (Common Council file #190826), said implementation of those 2011 legislative maps has granted an advantage to Republican candidates for office in Wisconsin in each election since, as first evidenced by the results of the 2012 elections, in which the re-drawn maps enabled Republican candidates to win 60 of the Wisconsin Assembly's 99 seats, even though Democratic candidates won a majority of the statewide Assembly vote.

The advantage continued through to the recent 2018 election, in which the Republican party won 27 more Assembly seats than the Democratic party, even though Democratic candidates received 203,373 more Assembly votes statewide

than Republican candidates.

Alderman Johnson said that following the upcoming 2020 Census, the state Legislature will again have the opportunity to re-draw the state's legislative maps using the same partisan procedure.

"To address the issues of fairness and partisan legislative redistricting in 2020 and beyond, the State Legislature could establish a non-partisan re-districting procedure for drawing legislative district maps, but it is clear that convincing members of the Republican-controlled Legislature to reform a redistricting procedure that has been successfully exploited to benefit candidates from the Republican Party is likely to require significant political pressure," he said.

"A referendum on the upcoming April 7, 2020, ballot gives our citizens a chance to weigh in on this critically important issue and could demonstrate Milwaukee voters' support for establishing a non-partisan procedure for establishing new legislative maps," Alderman Johnson said.

In 2016, a federal court found that in preparing the new legislative maps in 2011, Republican members of the Wisconsin Legislature employed partisan gerrymandering techniques known as cracking and packing to split or concentrate Democratic votes in particular districts in an effort to dilute the voting power of Wisconsin's Democratic electors and to entrench Republican control of the Legislature. While the federal court found that Wisconsin's Democratic voters were burdened by the discriminatory effect of the new legislative maps in both the 2012 and 2014 state elections, the U.S. Supreme Court, in another gerrymandering case, ruled that partisan gerrymandering claims, like those at issue in Wisconsin, cannot be decided by the courts but instead must be resolved through the political process.

"That Supreme Court ruling makes a local referendum on the issue that much more germane and important," Alderman Johnson said.

The legislation will go to the full Common Council when it meets on Tuesday, September 24 at 9 a.m. in the third floor Council Chamber at City Hall, 200 E. Wells St.

The full Council meeting on September 24 will be televised live on the City Channel (Channel 25 on Spectrum Cable and on AT&T U-Verse Channel 99) in the City of Milwaukee. It can also be viewed via streaming video on the City website at



milwaukee.gov/Channel25.