

Wisconsin State Conference of Branches: Wisconsin NAACP demands review of redistricting maps

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The Wisconsin Senate will vote Monday, November 8, 2021, on new political maps as a result of the 2020 census data and redistricting. The current makeup of the Senate is 21 Republicans and 12 Democrats, and the Assembly is 60 Republicans and 38 Democrats. Wisconsin's current political maps are regarded by some to be among the most gerrymandered in the nation.

On September 29, 2021, the Senate voted along party lines, to approve a resolution containing principles spelled out clearly in the law, such as maintaining equal district population, while others, such as retaining core existing districts, are not. The Assembly approved the resolution which does not the force of law but is intended to guide the state's next political maps.

A Campaign Legal Center analysis sharply criticized the Legislature's maps of the proposed state legislative districts, arguing they fall short in the number of measures of fairness, including whether some votes are "wasted" by many Democratic voters being "packed" into a few districts. It is likely that the proposed redistricting maps would minimize and depress voting outcomes for minority-dominated districts, and disproportionately impact statewide elections.

Following the release of the People's Maps Commission final recommendations, the chairperson stated the proposals would make more substantial alterations to the current maps and those changes may lead to some "temporary disenfranchisement." According to some, the People's Map is competitive with a

smaller GOP edge. The People's Commission asserts that it heard from nearly 2,000 Wisconsinites in 68 counties and 321 municipalities and received over 800 communities of interest, which were distilled to around 35 commonly submitted communities. The Commission heard people from every corner of the state.

The Wisconsin State NAACP believes redistricting is important because it is the means to access political representation. When it is done fairly it makes the ideal of "one person, one vote" a reality. When it is done unfairly, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, for members of the community to elect their preferred candidates, and have their voices heard in government. How and where legislative districts are drawn in Wisconsin will ultimately determine who gets elected and makes decisions about our lives.

Furthermore, since 1965, the Voting Rights Act has protected minority voting rights. We must honor the principles of the Voting Rights Act and applaud its contribution to civil rights in Wisconsin. The Voting Rights Act forbids officials from drawing redistricting plans that discriminate, as often found when a redistricting plan concentrates minority communities into a small number of districts (known as "packing") or spreads minorities out into too many districts (known as "cracking" or "splitting"). Both weakens the political power of communities of color.

The NAACP Wisconsin finds that both plans fall short: It is unacceptable that the Legislature's plan may potentially pack voters of color into fewer districts. Similarly, it is unacceptable that the People's Commission has changes that would temporarily disenfranchise voters. Both outcomes are in opposition to the mission and values of the NAACP.

Therefore, the Wisconsin NAACP demands a review of both proposed redistricting plans. The review should be conducted by an independent counsel for compliance with the Voting Rights Act, adherence to the principles of fair districts that represent the political power of communities of color and assessing whether the plans include fair representation of communities of color.