

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SJR 8210

As Reported by House Committee On:
State Government

Brief Description: Amending the Constitution to advance the date for completion of the redistricting plan.

Sponsors: Senators Schoesler, Nelson and Mullet.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government: 2/23/16, 2/24/16 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Secretary of State to submit to the voters at the next general election, a constitutional amendment adjusting the deadline for completion of the state redistricting plan to November 15 of each year ending in one.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 6 members: Representatives S. Hunt, Chair; Holy, Ranking Minority Member; Van Werven, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Frame, Hawkins and Moscoso.

Staff: Dawn Eychaner (786-7135).

Background:

Since 1983 the state Constitution has required a redistricting commission (Commission) to be formed every 10 years in order to adjust congressional and state legislative district boundaries. As provided for in the Constitution, the Commission must be established in January of each year ending in one, and must complete a redistricting plan as soon as possible following the federal decennial census, but no later than January 1 of each year ending in two. Within eight months after receiving the federal census data, local governments with internal districts are also required to adjust district boundaries.

State and federal law require voting districts boundaries be drawn to:

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- represent equal numbers (to the extent practicable) of people based on decennial census population data;
- contain contiguous and compact territory;
- coincide with the boundaries of local political subdivisions and areas recognized as communities of interest; and
- separate districts by natural geographic barriers, artificial barriers, or political subdivision boundaries.

A redistricting plan must not favor or discriminate against any political party or group. If the Commission fails to approve a redistricting plan through a majority vote by January 1 in a year ending in two, the Supreme Court must adopt a plan by April 30 of that same year. The Legislature may amend a redistricting plan through a two-thirds vote of each house within the first 30 days of the legislative session immediately following the Commission's completion of the plan.

In order to amend the state Constitution, a proposed amendment must first be approved by a two-thirds vote of each house of the Legislature and subsequently approved by a majority vote of the voters at the next general election.

Summary of Bill:

The Secretary of State must submit to the voters at the next general election an amendment to the state Constitution requiring the Commission to complete a redistricting plan by November 15 of each year ending in one.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) In 2012 the redistricting plan was submitted to the Legislature a day late. If the date is moved, the Redistricting Commission can avoid having staff working over the holidays, which will make it easier to recruit qualified staff. This resolution passed the Senate unanimously and is a good housekeeping measure. Elections departments around the state have a short amount of time to prepare districts and candidate filings now. The extra time allowed by this measure would be very helpful to counties and to the Secretary of State. When the original deadlines were established for redistricting, the Commission was still using paper maps. Now digital maps are available and make the redistricting process easier.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Senator Schoesler, prime sponsor; and David Elliott, Office of the Secretary of State.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.