



Redistricting

Legislative Issue Brief
2015 General Assembly Session

Our Vision

A world where people of all faiths cooperate to create compassionate communities that are just, peaceful, equitable and sustainable.

Our Mission

To empower Virginians to create social justice for all by advocating for systemic change.

Our Work

We unite people of faith in Virginia. Through partnerships with other statewide non-profit advocacy organizations and our own grassroots networks, we empower faithful advocates to:

- LEARN -
about the issues
challenging our communities

- PRAY -
for guidance and
discernment

- ACT -
to make Virginia a more just
and compassionate
Commonwealth.

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Every ten years, Virginia creates new boundaries for state and federal districts. Historically, the majority party forms districts that will hurt the opposing party for the next decade of elections. Virginia is one of 28 states in which legislators are wholly responsible for redrawing maps. As demographics change and new citizens vote in larger numbers, an impartial and nonpartisan process for drawing districts is essential.

The 2011 legislative session resulted in the formation of strange new districts. Legislators from the minority party were “redistricted” out of office. Districts were carved up to create majorities likely to keep the same party in power. Other districts were given warped boundaries that split communities.

The term “political gerrymander” has been defined as the “practice of dividing a geographical area into electoral districts, often of highly irregular shape, to give one political party an unfair advantage by diluting the opposition’s voting strength.” However, courts have had difficulty determining when officials illegally use partisanship in the redistricting process. In 2004, the Supreme Court ruled, in a fractured opinion, that it was unable to adjudicate a political gerrymandering claim that arose in Indiana. Virginia’s 2011 problematic redistricting scheme was likewise allowed to take effect.

Partisan redistricting contributes to polarization in both Congress and the Virginia General Assembly. This division decreases cooperation across the aisles and can result in a deadlock over federal and Commonwealth budgets. Fixing the redistricting process cannot completely solve this issue, but a fair, non-partisan approach to drawing districts can make a significant change.

Urged by the Virginia Redistricting Reform Coalition, legislation to reform the redistricting process has been introduced to the General Assembly every year since 2005. Each year, these bills and proposed constitutional amendments have passed the Senate. We need continued support and pressure to move legislation completely through the legislature.

The Facts

- Placing the power to draw district lines in an independent commission eliminates or reduces problems such as deadlock in drawing district lines that then requires Court intervention.
- Politicians have a conflict of interest between creating fair districts and increasing their party’s political power and their own political safety.
- Partisan redistricting allows a small majority to dominate one or both chambers of the General Assembly, marginalizing a significant bloc of voters statewide.
- Partisan gerrymandering results in legislative gridlock.
- Creation of gerrymandered “safe” districts usually results in the election of candidates who are at the extreme edges of their party and unwilling to compromise to enact legislation that is controversial in any way or not favored by political party leaders.
- Due to the increase in “safe” seats, legislators have less of a need to compromise. By lowering the number of “safe” seats, bipartisan redistricting lessens both the likelihood of gridlock and partisan bias in decision-making.
- A redistricting commission results in a more efficient government.
- Statistically, maps crafted by bipartisan commissions result in less litigation, freeing up court dockets and saving taxpayers’ money in court operation.
- By shifting redistricting responsibility to a commission, legislators have more time to tend to the people’s business, like passing a state budget or reaching a solution on transportation funding, during the normal session.
- Legislators elected from competitive, non-gerrymandered districts are more likely to enact legislation based on its merits and the good of the Commonwealth rather than on party-line directives.

Sources: <http://www.redrawingthelines.org/traditionalredistrictingprinciples>; onevirginia2021.org



Redistricting Talking Points

2015 General Assembly Session

Meeting with your legislator

- **Explain** your perspective on fair redistricting
- **Share** a story how redistricting reform would benefit people in your congregation or community.
- **Advocate** using the talking points below, for how redistricting reform would benefit all Virginians. Present 3-5 data points from the list below that you find most persuasive.
- **Ask** that your representative take action on the policy issue and ask for a commitment.

The case for fair redistricting

- *Partisan redistricting harms the democratic process.*
 - Virginia's demographics are changing and our legislative districts should appropriately represent the population of the Commonwealth.
 - Fairly drawn districts promote more competitive elections and result in the election of leaders more likely to act in the true interests of Virginians.
 - Partisan gerrymandering cuts through logical communities in order to create districts favorable to the party in power. This results in lower voter turnout, increased polarization of legislative bodies, a lack of bipartisan compromise, and increased likelihood of budget deadlocks.
- *Gerrymandering is a bipartisan problem with a bipartisan solution.*
 - Even though Virginia will not be redistricted until 2021, it is important that we pass reforms to the redistricting process now. Every year since 2005, legislation has been introduced in the General Assembly and passed the Senate, but has been held up in the House Committee on Privileges and Elections. This shouldn't be and isn't an issue of political parties, this is an issue of fairness.
 - Former Lt. Gov. Bill Bolling (R) and Del. David Bulova (D-Fairfax) are two among several current and former legislators, judges, and government administrators who support fair redistricting.
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- *Tell a story that illustrates your message and the impact of the issue. Ideally, use an example from the legislator's district.*

The Ask

As a person of faith, I believe that everyone is created equal.

Senator/Delegate _____, I ask you to strengthen regulations on Virginia's redistricting process and help ensure that our voices are heard equally in elections.