

TO: Legislative Colleagues  
FROM: Sen. Jeff Smith and Sen. Kelda Roys  
Rep. Deb Andraca and Rep. Sara Rodriguez  
DATE: Monday, May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021  
RE: Co-sponsorship of LRB 0756/1: Nonpartisan  
Redistricting Reform  
**DEADLINE: Monday, May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2021 by 5pm**

Wisconsin citizens overwhelmingly support fair maps. In fact, as of April this year, 55 counties, representing 83% of all Wisconsin residents, have passed resolutions urging legislators to support nonpartisan redistricting reform. There have been 32 counties that have held referenda on nonpartisan redistricting reform and they have passed with an average of 70% of the vote.

Growing up, we were all taught every vote counts. However, that is not always the case in states when politicians are responsible for drawing legislative district lines. Gerrymandered maps silence voters and prevent elected officials from being held accountable by creating noncompetitive elections.

Without fair and competitive elections, overwhelmingly popular policies continue to be ignored. Gerrymandered maps produce more politicians who are on the far-ends of the political spectrum while moderate politicians are forced to run further away from the center in strongly Republican or Democratic districts. Legislators don't have to serve their constituents to remain in office.

The people of Wisconsin have a right to fair representation. Voters should choose their politicians; politicians should not choose their voters.

Gerrymandering has always happened – Republicans and Democrats have done it here in Wisconsin and nationally. New map drawing technology and the oceans of personal data available allow politicians to draw perfectly gerrymandered maps compared to previous redistricting efforts. Wisconsin's current maps drawn in 2011 are considered by many to be among the most gerrymandered maps in the nation.

We are introducing legislation to create a nonpartisan legislative redistricting process based on the successful model used in Iowa. Passing nonpartisan redistricting reform is the right thing to do so Wisconsin's lawmakers can properly reflect the will of the voters.

### ***Analysis by the Legislative Reference Bureau***

Analysis by the Legislative Reference Bureau Currently, under the state constitution, the legislature is directed to redistrict legislative districts according to the number of inhabitants at its next session following each decennial federal census. At the same intervals, the legislature also reapportions congressional districts in this state pursuant to federal law. Under current state law, following each decennial federal census, most municipalities are also required to divide their territory into wards. With limited exceptions, wards are required to consist of one or more whole, contiguous census blocks (the smallest geographic units for which census results are available). Traditionally, the legislature has used municipal wards to construct legislative and congressional districts, although the legislature may adjust the boundaries of a municipal ward and use the revised ward boundaries instead. Legislative and

congressional redistricting plans enacted pursuant to this procedure are used to elect members of the legislature and members of Congress in the fall of the second year following the year of the census.

This bill creates a new procedure for the preparation of legislative and congressional redistricting plans. The bill directs the Legislative Reference Bureau to draw redistricting plans based upon standards specified in the bill and establishes a Redistricting Advisory Commission to perform certain tasks in the redistricting process. The bill also makes various other changes to the laws governing redistricting. Significant aspects of the bill include the following

### ***Redistricting standards***

Under the bill, a redistricting plan drawn by the LRB must satisfy several criteria, including the following:

1. The plan must be based on population requirements imposed under the Wisconsin Constitution and the U.S. Constitution and requirements imposed under Section 2 of the federal Voting Rights Act, which, among other things, generally prohibits redistricting plans from abridging the right to vote on account of race or color or because a person is a member of a language minority group.

2. The senate and assembly districts established in the plan must satisfy equal population standards specified in the bill. Among other things, no senate district may have a population that exceeds that of any other senate district by more than 10 percent and no assembly district may have a population that exceeds that of any other assembly district by more than 10 percent, unless necessary to maintain compliance with Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act. Congressional districts established in the plan must each have a population as nearly equal as practicable to the ideal population for such districts, while maintaining compliance with Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act.

3. District boundaries under the plan must coincide with municipal ward boundaries and, to the extent consistent with the Wisconsin Constitution, the U.S. Constitution, and Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act, must coincide with the boundaries of political subdivisions. The number of political subdivisions divided among more than one district must be as small as possible and, with limited exceptions, if there is a choice among political subdivisions to divide, the more populous political subdivisions shall be divided before the less populous.

4. Districts must be composed of convenient contiguous territory. Under the bill, areas which meet only at the points of adjoining corners are not contiguous.

5. To the extent consistent with the requirements described in items 1. to 3., districts must be compact. The bill also specifies how compactness is to be measured.

6. In preparing the plan, the LRB must be strictly nonpartisan. No district may be drawn for the purpose of favoring a political party, incumbent legislator or member of Congress, or other person or group or, except to the extent necessary to meet the requirements described in item 1., for the purpose of augmenting or diluting the voting strength of a language or racial minority group. The LRB may not use political affiliations of registered voters, previous election results, or demographic information, except as necessary to test the efficiency gap and competitiveness of each district, or use residence addresses of incumbent legislators or members of Congress. The LRB may

also use demographic information as necessary to meet the requirements described in item 1.

7. The number of assembly districts may not be less than 54 nor more than 100. The number of senate districts may not be more than one-third nor less than one-fourth of the number of assembly districts. Each senate district must contain only whole assembly districts and, with certain exceptions, each congressional district may contain only whole senate districts, to the extent possible.

8. Districts must be drawn so that neither the intent nor the result of the plan abridges the equal opportunity of racial or language minorities to participate in the political process.

### ***Redistricting Advisory Commission***

The bill assigns several tasks to the Redistricting Advisory Commission, including the following:

1. If requested to do so by the LRB, the commission must provide direction to the LRB concerning any decision the LRB must make in preparing a redistricting plan for which no clearly applicable guideline is provided under the bill.

2. The commission must oversee the work of LRB employees engaged in preparing a redistricting plan and may enter into contracts for hiring experts to assist in plan preparation. Entering into such a contract, or terminating a contract employee, requires approval from three-fourths of the members of the commission.

3. The commission must make available to the public at the earliest feasible time copies of any redistricting bill delivered by the LRB to the legislature, as provided under the bill, maps illustrating the redistricting bill, a summary of the standards applicable to the LRB for development of the plan in the redistricting bill, and a statement of the population of each district created in the plan and the relative deviation of each district population from the ideal district population.

4. The commission must conduct public hearings on a redistricting bill delivered by the LRB to the legislature, as provided under the bill, unless the redistricting bill represents a plan drawn in response to a redistricting bill that was previously delivered to the legislature and rejected by at least one house. The bill also requires the commission to hold a hearing in each of the congressional districts in this state and, whenever it is practicable, on weekends. The commission must submit a report to the legislature summarizing information and testimony received by the commission at the hearings. The report may also include any comments and conclusions that the commission's members deem appropriate concerning the information and testimony received at the hearings or otherwise presented to the commission.

The bill also permits the commission to establish policies limiting the information that the LRB may provide to persons outside of LRB staff concerning any redistricting plan drawn by the LRB, except that any such policy does not apply to population data furnished to the LRB by the U.S. Bureau of the Census or to a redistricting plan after a bill embodying that plan is delivered by the LRB to the legislature as required under the bill. The bill also provides that any draft maps, along with the data sets used to create them, that the LRB produces in the course of preparing a redistricting plan must be open to public inspection and copying and made available on the Internet site of the LRB as soon as they are produced.

Under the bill, the Redistricting Advisory Commission must be created not later than February 15 of the first year following the decennial federal census and terminates upon satisfying its duties, until a new Redistricting Advisory Commission is created for the next round of legislative and congressional redistricting. The commission consists of five members. The speaker and minority leader of the assembly and the majority and minority leaders of the senate must each appoint one person to serve on the commission. Within 30 days after the fourth commission member is appointed, but not later than February 15 of the first year following the decennial federal census, the four commission members so appointed must select the fifth commission member, who serves as chairperson. The bill prohibits all of the following individuals from being commission members: individuals who are not eligible electors of this state at the time of the appointment, individuals who hold partisan public office or political party office, and individuals who are a relative of or are employed by a member of the legislature or of Congress or are employed directly by the legislature or Congress.

### ***Redistricting process***

The bill requires the LRB to perform certain tasks in preparation for drawing congressional and legislative redistricting plans on the basis of each federal decennial census. For example, as soon as possible after receiving from the U.S. Bureau of the Census the population data needed for legislative redistricting, the LRB must use that data to assign a population figure to geographic or political units to facilitate the drawing of redistricting plans. Typically, this data is available on or about April 1 of the first year following the decennial federal census. The LRB must also prepare and publish an analysis describing the population of current legislative and congressional districts and the extent to which the districts may violate the redistricting standards described above. In addition, as municipalities complete their ward plans (typically, by October of the first year following the decennial federal census), the LRB must assign a population figure based upon certified federal census data to each municipal ward, for use in drawing redistricting plans.

Not later than January 1 of the second year following the decennial federal census, the LRB must deliver to the majority leader of the senate and speaker of the assembly identical bills embodying a plan of legislative and congressional redistricting, drawn in accordance with the standards described above. The bill further specifies a procedure that the legislature must follow in considering the bills, although that procedure is not enforceable by the courts. The bill requires either the assembly or the senate to bring the bill to a vote expeditiously, but not less than seven days after the report of the Redistricting Advisory Commission is received and made available to the members of the legislature. The vote must be under a procedure or rule permitting no amendments. If the bill is approved by the first house in which it is considered, the bill must expeditiously be brought to a vote in the second house under a similar procedure or rule.

If neither of the bills delivered by the LRB is approved by both the assembly and the senate, the chief clerk of the house that failed to approve the bill must transmit to the LRB information that the house may direct regarding reasons why the plan was not approved. The LRB must then prepare identical bills embodying a second plan of legislative and congressional redistricting, taking into account the reasons transmitted to

the LRB, insofar as it is possible to do so while complying with the standards described above. The LRB must deliver the bill to the majority leader of the senate and the speaker of the assembly no later than 21 days after the date of the vote by which the senate or the assembly failed to approve the bill initially submitted. This second bill must be expeditiously introduced and brought to a vote not less than seven days after the date of introduction, in the same manner as prescribed for the initial bill.

If the second bill is similarly rejected by at least one house, the same procedure applies, except that the third bill is subject to amendment in the same manner as other bills. In addition, the third bill and any amendments to it may be passed only with the approval of three-fourths of all the members elected in each house.

The bill also provides exceptions to this process to account for variations in the timing of the release of federal census data.

In addition, the bill prohibits the majority leader of the senate, the minority leader of the senate, the speaker of the assembly, or the minority leader of the assembly from assigning or hiring any person to work with the LRB to prepare for redistricting, to prepare plans, or to oversee either process.

### ***Required contents of redistricting bills***

The LRB must ensure that each bill embodying a redistricting plan it draws contains specified conventions to apply wherever territory in a plan is described by geographic boundaries. Also, each such bill must provide that the bill first applies, with respect to regular elections, to offices filled at the next occurring general election and, with respect to special or recall elections, to offices filled or contested on or after the date of the next occurring general election.

### ***Challenge based on population inequality***

If an action is brought challenging a legislative redistricting plan adopted under the procedure established in the bill on the basis of an excessive population variance among senate or assembly districts, the legislature has the burden of justifying any variance in excess of 10 percent between the population of a senate or assembly district and the applicable ideal district population. If an action is brought challenging a congressional redistricting plan adopted under the procedure established in the bill on the basis of an excessive population variance among congressional districts, the legislature has the burden of justifying any variance in excess of 1 percent between the population of a congressional district and the applicable ideal district population.

For further information see the state fiscal estimate, which will be printed as an appendix to this bill.