

## Redistricting in Montana

Montana's population has grown over the last 10 years as proved by the 2020 US Census data. As a result, Montana was awarded a second congressional seat in the US House of Representatives. Montana's Districting and Apportionment Commission will be drawing the line that will divide our state into two congressional districts.

There is a fundamental principle at stake: the dividing line should be drawn so that voters can choose their representatives, not so that politicians can choose their voters!

How will this dividing line affect you? The district boundaries define where federal funds for schools, hospitals, roads, etc. are distributed. All of these have an impact on your life. The boundaries set up now will be the same for the next 10 years. A lot changes over 10 years – a five-year-old becomes a 15-year-old teenager!

Montana's Commission is not free to draw the line anywhere they wish; there are criteria they are legally bound to follow. Each district must be:

- equal in population,
- contiguous and compact, and
- comply with state and national Constitutional provisions to protect the voting rights of minorities.

Montana's Commission also adopted non-mandatory goals that they will consider:

- political parity, i.e., that the map does not unduly favor one party;
- avoiding splitting political subdivisions such as counties, cities and towns;
- creating districts that are politically competitive rather than safe for either party;
- and
- keeping communities of interest intact.

What is a community of interest? A geographic area in which people share common concerns that would be better represented if not arbitrarily divided between districts.

Montana has defined the types of common concerns that qualify as a community of interest:

- Indian reservations
- urban, rural, and suburban interests;
- school districts;
- neighborhoods;
- trade areas;
- location, demographics, communication and transportation networks;
- social, cultural, historic and economic interests; and
- occupations and lifestyles.

Creating fair districts requires balancing many factors. *Political competitiveness* ensures those elected work hard to represent a broad range of constituents and improves their responsiveness to the voters. *Political parity* ensures that each political party will have representation in proportion to the party's overall share of voters. Both require looking at voting pattern data to assess fairness. *Communities of interest* are defined by the people within them and depend upon citizen input. *Minimizing dividing counties, cities and towns*, and other existing boundaries must be balanced against all the other factors.

State law gives the Commission 90 days from when they received the census data to draw the line. The Commission has set October 19 for the public hearing on nine map(s) submitted by the public. The Commission will then propose its own map and hold another hearing on October 30. November 9<sup>th</sup> as the deadline for their final decision on where the line will fall.

Montana's Commissioners want to hear from citizens.

People can submit comments in written form anytime, and up through 5:00 pm October 16 to be distributed to the Commission before the hearing. Go the Commission's website to review the proposed maps and make comments: <https://mtredistricting.gov/>

You can also provide live testimony at the hearing, either by being present in the hearing room in the Capitol building in Helena, or via Zoom.

As noted above, the Commission has identified four goals that they can take into account in achieving a fair map. The League has expressed the following concerns about these goals:

- a. Keeping Communities of Interest intact. Communities of interest are, by definition, defined by those in the community, not by outsiders looking in. The League recognizes that people within communities of interest speak for themselves. Others cannot speak for them. Montana's Native American communities of interest have weighed in with their concerns about redistricting. Their expressed concern is to have at least two reservations in each District.
- b. Minimizing dividing political subdivisions. This concern overlaps with communities of interest in terms of trade areas and city and county boundaries. Splitting an urban area down the middle makes no sense.
- c. Make districts competitive where possible: Voters are more engaged in districts that are competitive, i.e., where either party has a chance to win the seat. Representatives elected from competitive districts are more likely to be responsive to all their constituents' concerns. Competitive districts also encourage voter participation in elections.
- d. Political parity: To maintain political fairness, those elected should mirror the political makeup of the voters statewide. Some of the proposed maps propose that both districts have a majority of majority party voters, which effectively

disenfranchises nearly half of the voters statewide that are in the minority party. Having a district with essentially equal numbers of voters from each party that would regularly flip between the parties would allow more equal representation over time.

Citizen input should be the deciding factor in drawing a line in a specific way. This can only happen if citizens express their comments, concerns, and ideas to the Commission. Although Montana's Commission is independent of legislative control, four of the five commissioners are political appointees who are concerned that their party gains the most advantage they can. The Commission needs to hear from everyday voters who are more concerned about fairness than about political gain. Citizen input creates a written record from which the Commission will justify a final decision. Now is your chance to speak up and let the Commission know what is important to you!