

Minority leaders denounce proposed redistricting maps

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Leaders representing blacks, Hispanics and Asian-Americans on Tuesday denounced a congressional redistricting map released last week by the Governor's Redistricting Advisory Committee. The group chose Montgomery County as their venue, emphasizing a region in the state that had the highest minority population growth over the last 10 years.

Led by Montgomery County Council President Valerie Ervin, the officials, all Democrats, said the redistricting committee largely ignored Census data showing the Washington suburbs as the fastest growing minority area in the last 10 years. They called the proposed maps seriously flawed and deficient.

"The Governor's Redistricting Advisory Committee plan clearly chooses to ignore the most important and fundamental demographic changes that have taken place here in Maryland over the past 10 years," said Del. Ana Sol Gutierrez. "The maps have failed to meet federal and state constitutional requirements by ignoring the basic principle of one-person one-vote."

In accordance with federal law, states must redraw their legislative lines every 10 years based on the most current Census data. Gov. Martin O'Malley appointed a Redistricting Advisory Committee in July consisting of four Democrats and one Republican.

Sol-Gutierrez said the maps diluted the minority vote, reassigned minorities, and fragmented communities of interest. The group urged the governor to remove the 3rd Congressional District from Montgomery County and restore minority representation in the 4th and 8th Districts.

"What do Frederick County voters have in common with Montgomery County voters?" Sol-Gutierrez asked. "I say they have issues in contrary positions. Montgomery County voters have been welcoming immigration reform – an issue key to the Hispanic community. Frederick County voters, on the other hand, are the most unfriendly to the immigrant community. What does this say of commonality of interests?"

The Legislative Black Caucus redistricting chair, Del. Aisha Braveboy, Prince George's, pointed out a number of deficiencies in the plan. She said it did not honor the spirit and intent of Section 2 of the federal Voting Rights Act.

According to Braveboy, under the new plan, there would be two majority minority congressional districts (4 and 7), and the minority voting age population would decrease in each district. A reconfigured 8th Congressional District that would include parts of Montgomery, Frederick and Carroll counties goes from 50% minority voting population to 34%. And the overall minority voting population would decrease by splitting black, Hispanic and Asian populations currently in congressional districts into three.

“It’s ironic because these are the groups that actually grew in the state,” Braveboy said. “There’s a growth amongst minorities and a reduction of representation. That really flies in the face of Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act, which seeks to preserve and not dilute minority voting strength.”

Rep. Donna Edwards, who represents the 4th Congressional District, released a [statement](#) opposing the advisory committee’s recommended plan. Political sources say it was Edwards who pushed the strategy to go after the 6th Congressional District seat held by 10-term incumbent Republican Roscoe Bartlett.

O’Malley is refining the committee’s recommended maps this week. On Wednesday, his staff will meet with representatives from the NAACP, which showed no signs Tuesday of accepting the currently proposed maps.

“We will not allow disenfranchisement,” said Elbridge James, political director of the Maryland NAACP chapter and speaking on behalf of the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund. “We will force on our governor and his leadership team the issue that African-Americans, Latinos and Asian-Americans will not be violated for the benefit of a few.”

A special session of the Maryland General Assembly will convene Monday to consider the final redistricting map the governor submits, as well as other plans legislators may offer.