
**State Government & Tribal Relations
Committee**

HB 2575

Brief Description: Concerning reforms to increase transparency and accountability of the Washington redistricting commission.

Sponsors: Representatives Pellicciotti, Ryu, Tarleton, Orwall, Dolan, J. Johnson and Pollet.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Makes changes to the administration of the Washington Redistricting Commission (Commission), including providing for the pre-selection of Commissioners and altering staff and salary requirements.
- Adds requirements for Commission meetings and public forums, including notice and language access requirements.
- Requires additional information and data to be provided in Commission reports.

Hearing Date: 1/21/20

Staff: Carrington Skinner (786-7192).

Background:

In 1982 legislation was enacted to create a Commission that was tasked with drawing congressional and state legislative districts. Under the State Constitution, the Commission is established in January of each year ending in a one, and is composed of five members: one appointed by each of the legislative leaders of the two largest caucuses in each of the two houses, and one nonvoting chair chosen by those four appointed members. Voting members must be appointed by January 15 of each year ending in one. The chairperson must be selected by January 31.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

In carrying out its duties, the Commission is permitted to employ experts, consultants, and support staff. Commissioners are entitled to \$100 in compensation for each day spent in performance of their duties.

The deadline for the Commission to approve a redistricting plan is November 15 of each year ending in one. If three members cannot agree on a plan by the deadline, the Washington Supreme Court must adopt a plan. The Legislature can amend a redistricting plan only by a two-thirds majority vote in each chamber within 30 days after the plan is submitted by the Commission.

To the extent possible, district lines in the Commission's redistricting plan must coincide with boundaries of local political subdivisions and areas recognized as "communities of interest," and must be composed of convenient, contiguous, and compact territory. The district lines must also provide fair and effective representation and encourage electoral competition. The Commission cannot draw lines that purposely favor or discriminate against any political party or group.

Along with the redistricting plan, the Commission must publish a report that includes:

- the population of each district and the percentage it deviates from the average district population, along with a justification for each deviation;
- an explanation of the criteria used in developing the plan;
- a map of all the districts; and
- the estimated cost incurred by the counties for adjusting precinct boundaries.

Summary of Bill:

Commission Administration.

Legislative leaders of both parties in each house must designate an appointee to the Commission by December 1 of each year ending in zero. Prior to the Commission's establishment in January of each year ending in one, Commissioner-designees are permitted to attend training, hire staff, secure and set up offices, create a Commission website, and select a chairperson. The deadline for the selection of a chairperson is moved forward to January 1.

The salary of Commissioners is increased to \$80,000 per year beginning on the date of official appointment to the Commission and ending November 15 of each year ending in one. Commissioners are required to attend trainings on nonpartisan redistricting, the Public Records Act, and the Open Public Meetings Act.

The Commission must employ staff to meet its needs, including positions related to communications, information technology, and language access.

Meetings and Public Forums.

The Commission is required to hold two rounds of public forums in each of the state's congressional districts. The Commission must seek input from all significant communities of interest and may hold additional public forums if it determines that it has not received input that represents the diverse demographics of the state. In addition, within 90 days of its establishment, the Commission must solicit testimony about local demographics from election officials.

Notice of any public forum must be provided at least 20 days in advance in all languages required for voting materials in the district under the federal Voting Rights Act. Reasonable efforts must be made to provide translation services and other accommodations for limited-English-speaking individuals at Commission meetings.

The Commission website must include information about Commission meetings and documents produced by the Commission, as well as a means for the public to submit comments and proposed plans. Technology must allow for real-time remote participation at Commission meetings.

A person who submits testimony at a Commission meeting must identify whether he or she is a lobbyist.

Reporting.

Before any public forum is held, the Commission must publish a report detailing its priorities and intentions for using redistricting criteria in its decision-making process. Any preliminary plan and reasonably final plan must be made public to allow for public review and comment.

The final report that accompanies the redistricting plan must include:

- a summary of all public input received;
- all plans discussed by the full Commission;
- a summary of the data used to create those plans;
- analyses of the maps using specified redistricting metrics;
- a written explanation if an alternative plan furthers redistricting criteria more than the final plan; and
- any other information that provides the basis on which the Commission made its decisions.

If a Commissioner votes against the redistricting plan, that Commissioner must file a dissenting report explaining his or her decision.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 15, 2020.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.