

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SB 5560

As Reported by House Committee On:
State Government & Tribal Relations

Title: An act relating to procedures for approval and submission of the redistricting plan.

Brief Description: Concerning procedures for approval and submission of the redistricting plan.

Sponsors: Senators Pedersen, Wilson, J., Billig, Hunt, Kuderer, Mullet and Randall.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government & Tribal Relations: 2/17/22, 2/21/22 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Redistricting Commission to make a redistricting plan publicly available at least 72 hours before voting to approve it.
- Requires any amendments to the plan to be debated and voted on in open session.
- Requires that at least 24 hours pass after any amendments to a redistricting plan are adopted before a vote on final approval.
- Specifies that a redistricting plan must include maps and census unit descriptions.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & TRIBAL RELATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 6 members: Representatives Valdez, Chair; Lekanoff, Vice Chair; Volz, Ranking Minority Member; Dolan, Graham and Gregerson.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 1 member: Representative Walsh, Assistant Ranking Minority Member.

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

Staff: Jason Zolle (786-7124).

Background:

Redistricting Commission.

The state Redistricting Commission (Commission) is tasked with drawing district boundaries for state legislative and congressional districts every 10 years based on the federal decennial census. The Commission is composed of five members. The legislative leaders of each of the two largest political caucuses in each house of the Legislature appoint one person to the Commission, and the fifth person, the chair, is appointed by the four legislative appointees.

The affirmative vote of three members is required to approve the redistricting plan. By November 15 of each year ending in one, the Commission must submit the redistricting plan to the Legislature. The Legislature may modify the plan with a two-thirds majority within the first 30 days of the next legislative session, though no more than 2 percent of the population of any district may be modified. If the Commission fails to meet this November 15 deadline, the state Supreme Court is required to draw and adopt a plan by April 30 of the year ending in two.

Redistricting in the 2020 Cycle.

Shortly before midnight on November 15, 2021, the Commission voted to approve congressional and redistricting plans. The Commission approved a formal resolution adopting the plan and transmitted the resolution to the Senate and House of Representatives shortly after midnight the morning of November 16, 2021. Maps and descriptions of the plans were made publicly available on the evening of November 16, 2021.

The Commission's executive director notified the state Supreme Court that the Commission did not adopt the plan by the midnight deadline and ceded responsibility for redistricting based on the 2020 Census to the court. On December 3, 2021, however, the Supreme Court found that the Commission had substantially complied with the essential purpose of the deadline and declined to take jurisdiction, placing the Commission's plan before the Legislature. The Legislature made minor changes to the districts in a concurrent resolution signed by both chambers on February 8, 2022.

Summary of Bill:

The Commission must make a redistricting plan publicly available at least 72 hours before voting to approve the plan. Any amendments to the plan must be debated and voted on in open session. If any amendments are approved, at least 24 hours must pass before the Commission is able to vote on final approval of the plan. The Commission's report on the plan must be made public when the plan is submitted to the Legislature, rather than when it is published.

A redistricting plan must include maps showing the division of the state into congressional and legislative districts and complete descriptions of each district using official census units, such as tracts and blocks.

The bill does not apply to any redistricting plans already submitted to the Legislature.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This bill is designed to address procedural problems that came up during the redistricting process in November. It is critical to take action now, while that process is still fresh in the public's memory. The public input process was a success, with more people testifying than previously. But many people were shocked watching the Commission vote on plans that did not even exist at the time they were being voted on. Commission activities were not transparent, and the public was left with no idea what was considered or discussed. This bill does not go far enough; the state needs comprehensive nonpartisan redistricting reform. But this bill is the least that can be done now.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Senator Jamie Pedersen, prime sponsor; Karen Crowley; and Carolyn Burger.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.