



SF86 - Districting principles for legislative and congressional plans established

The manner in which congressional/legislative district lines are drawn can keep a community together or split it apart essentially changing whether that given community has representatives who feel responsible for their concerns.

Common Cause Minnesota supports SF86 delineated redistricting principles. However, by limiting the participants to only members of the legislature, SF86 does little to address the core basis requiring Minnesota's redistricting process to go through the State's Supreme Court. Furthermore, there is no room in SF86 for cost effective measures in MN's redistricting. It leaves the door open to continued court intervention, and hours of work by legislators likely to be lost. How does SF86 safeguard Minnesota's redistricting from the self-interests of legislators?

The growing polarization of Minnesota's legislature decreases cooperation across the aisles and has resulted in a deadlock over various budget and policy matters the last couple of legislative biennium. Fixing the redistricting process cannot completely solve this issue, but a fair, non-partisan approach to drawing districts can make a significant change.

There is no role for party partisanship in redistricting.

The Facts:

- Minnesota's Supreme Court have set congressional and legislative district lines EVERY DECADE except for once in 1970s.
- Minnesota's legislative body has not been able to work to set congressional/legislative district lines without the State's Supreme Court taking over the process.
- There may not be blatant examples of gerrymandering in Minnesota currently but that is only due to the Court's role and intervention in that process for the past several decades.
- There are various instances of districts that lack "competitiveness" which could be addressed through an independent redistricting commission.
- Good redistricting principles are only part of the safeguard against gerrymandering; eliminating the inherent self-interest is the other part.
- An independent body was created to address the matter of setting legislator's salaries acknowledging the inherent self-interest in that process.
- SF86 does not address that core problem that lead to constitutional challenge of the maps; political gerrymandering.
- SF86 is not cost effective and is inefficient in the use of legislator's time to draw maps which do not survive constitutional challenge.
- SF370 attempts to get to the core of the problem(s) posed by political gerrymandering by establishing an independent redistricting commission.

At this time Common Cause MN does not support SF86 - the need for improvement:

- It does little to address the causes leading to the last two redistricting cycles going through the Minnesota Supreme Court; political gerrymandering (intentional or not) or the implications of further disenfranchising Minnesota citizens in greater MN and the Twin Cities (intentional or not).

- It does little to address non-responsive representation. Legislators elected from competitive, non-gerrymandered districts are more likely to enact legislation based on its merits and the good of the Commonwealth rather than on party-line directives.
- Creation of gerrymandered “safe” districts in MN has resulted in the election of candidates who are at the extreme edges of their party and unwilling to compromise to enact legislation that is controversial in any way or not favored by political party leaders. If you look at the very big picture, one of the reasons we have the partisanship and resulting gridlock in D.C. is because of the very ideologically safe seats where you get far right, far left and no movement in Congress.
- Due to the increase in “safe” seats, legislators have less of a need to compromise. By lowering the number of “safe” seats, bipartisan redistricting lessens both the likelihood of gridlock and partisan bias in decision-making.
- Politicians have a conflict of interest between creating fair districts; increasing their party’s political power and their own political safety.
- Partisan redistricting allows a small majority to dominate one or both chambers of the legislative body; marginalizing a significant bloc of voters statewide.

Ways to Improve HF86 and minimizing risk for partisan gerrymandering:

- Allow for meaningful public input out in communities being impacted in greater MN and the Twin Cities. An open and transparent government is at the heart of democracy by and for all its people.
- Allow for an independent redistricting commission of either non-partisan or bipartisan membership to remove and minimize the impact of partisan gerrymandering from all sides. SF370 by Sen. Isaacson works to do that. Work collaboratively in a bipartisan manner to come up with a hybrid of both bills.

A redistricting commission results in a more efficient government and less cost. By shifting redistricting responsibility to a commission, legislators have more time to tend to the people’s business, like passing a state budget or reaching a solution on transportation funding, during the normal session that is not rushed in the last few minutes of the session.

Placing the power to draw district lines in an independent commission eliminates or reduces problems such as deadlock in drawing district lines that then requires Court intervention. This has been the case in MN the last 2 redistricting cycles.

Statistically, maps crafted by nonpartisan/bipartisan commissions result in lessen likelihood of politically driven gerrymandering and litigation, freeing up court dockets and saving taxpayers’ money in court operation.

Respectfully Submitted,

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