

Baltimore City Redistricting Reform Commission Meeting
University of Baltimore Law School
1401 N. Charles St., Baltimore, MD 21201

Judge Alex Williams - Calls meeting to order at 1:11pm

Judge Alex Williams - Welcomes everyone to Baltimore. I am the co – chair, we are here to hear from the public and stakeholder organizations. We have been at this two years now. The Commission was appointed by Governor Hogan. Gerrymandering is an issue haunting Maryland. Both congressional and legislative districts are drawn in an unfair manner. We have members of the commission joining us here today.

Governor Hogan appointed seven members to the Commission of whom three are Democrats, three are Republicans and one is not affiliated with a political party. The Governor selected Walter Olson, a Republican from Frederick County and Senior Fellow at the Cato Institute, and myself, a Democrat from Prince George’s County and former U.S. District Court Judge, to serve as co-chairmen of the Commission. Additional members appointed by the Governor include Tessa Hill-Aston, President of the Baltimore City branch of the NAACP, Michael Goff, who is the President of the Northeast-Midwest Institute and a board member at Common Cause Maryland. Christopher Summers, who is President of the Maryland Public Policy Institute. Carol Ramirez, a Bethesda resident and small business owner, and Ashley Oleson, Administrator for the League of Women Voters of Maryland were also added to the commission by Governor Hogan. President of the Maryland Senate Thomas V. Mike Miller, Jr. appointed Senator Joan Carter Conway who represents District 43 in Baltimore City and serves as Chair of the Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee. Speaker of the Maryland House of Delegates Michael E. Busch appointed Delegate Alonzo Washington who represents District 22 in Prince Georges County and serves on the Ways and Means Committee. Minority Leader of the Maryland Senate J.B. Jennings appointed Senator Stephen Waugh who represents District 29 in Calvert and St. Mary’s Counties and serves on the Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee. Minority Leader of the Maryland House of Delegates Nic Kipke appointed Delegate Jason Buckel who represents District 1B in Allegany County and serves on the Ways and Means Committee.

Walter Olson - We normally begin our meetings with an expert witness. I have brought two handouts so you can follow along. One is from SCOTUS blog, the leading blog on the Supreme Court by Amy Howl. The Justices tackled partisan gerrymandering today. Quoting a few highlights. The Supreme Court has been split on partisan gerrymandering for many years. However, they have not been as split on racial gerrymandering. About every 12 years they have declined to create a judicial remedy; however, the last round in a Pennsylvania case, Vieth v. Jubelir, Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote separately to say he believed other cases could develop a clearer standard on how to rectify, leaving the door open. Ever since then, lawyers interested in gerrymandering have wondered what this open door might create on the basis for a new Supreme Court doctrine. The panel ruled in favor of the challenger and ruled that in the

intervening years that enough had changed. One of the things that it changed was the expert testimony, the judges came up with a reasonable test. The Wisconsin case, once it had been determined by the state, was almost guaranteed to be taken up by the Supreme Court. Inevitably, it was taken up by review. We are pretty sure the four liberal justices of the group are probably in favor of striking down the Wisconsin case. If the court goes along with Wisconsin commission, most observers believe Maryland is high on the list to challenge Maryland's gerrymandering.

The second article is by Lyle Dennison, which sheds interesting light on how things could have worked out in Maryland. His piece is only about two weeks old. He points out the court has many different reasons. With Maryland and Wisconsin case technicalities. There could be significant problems for legislatures throughout the country. The oral argument begins on October 3rd.

Barbara Cohen – I moved to Laurel a few months ago. My specific question is what is your vision of what a legislature should look like? What are we trying to get to – geographic representation? Special interest representation?

Walter Olson - Our charter is not to draw lines. Our mission is to propose methods and procedures that would draw fairer lines. Similar to citizen commissions that were draw lines in Arizona and California. The goal is to remove officials and to give a commission a set of methods to draw the lines with, such as compactness of districts and congruence with existing subdivisions. It's best to not split up cities or counties.

Robert Cooker – I would like to address something you addressed in your report, but what does "fairness" mean? Imagine the state creates new reform districts. Do I get a voice in the system? I would suggest a system that promotes proportional representation, and we should redistrict in a way to approach the concept of proportional representation in the state.

Judge Alex Williams – Ultimate decision is going to be on the elected officials as the current system is.

Elizabeth Ratory – My name is Liz Ratory. I'm a former Democrat and I ran for the House of Delegates. When you live in District 8, you don't know what district you are in. Even when I was running, people thought they were part of District 8, 10 to 12 years ago. It's confusing to citizens to not know who their representatives are. Communities don't know their representatives or feel represented. I'm a former graduate of Howard Law. When I left the Democratic party they said "Republicans do it." It seems that when Democrats do it, the lines are more severe. They take urban populations to get the vote numbers. Takoma Park now has Jamie Raskin, and he is also now representing Taneytown, which is a Christian area being represented by an atheist. Communities vary throughout the state. At the retirement party of Barbara Mikulski, they said that the goal now is to get all 8 Congressman to be Democrats. I just wanted to articulate how this has affected our community. This is the core of our democracy. Judge Williams and Walter Olson have seen how it affects our day to day. Concerned that Annapolis is wielding too much power.

Alex Williams – Do you have specific recommendations you can give?

Elizabeth Ratory - Recommendation is to change the lines. The gerrymandering was the first reason I left the Democratic Party. You need to address representation foremost.

Jennifer Bevan- Dangel – I’m the Executive Director of Common Cause Maryland. It’s incredibly important to continue this dialogue to add legal analysis and a litmus test. Above all, we need to keep moving forward. The League of Women Voters and Common Cause recently held an event and people are more frustrated than ever before. We should not put reform efforts on hold while Wisconsin case is being settled.

Greg Holmes – I have a question for Delegate Jason Buckel: Jason what faith do you have, if any, in a bill in 2018 has any chance to pass?

Del. Jason Buckel - Last year we passed a bill that is never going to happen. We need more citizen advocacy.

Greg Holmes - We want a fair based system. Reflects the way the state is laid out by its citizens. We suffer as long as the process doesn’t change because legislators don’t put partisan reasons aside. Commission should look into racial redistricting in PG County and view redistricting from a racial lens. We need more competition in Maryland races, so maybe look into term limits for the legislature?

Ashley Oleson – I would add that citizens need to reach out to their elected officials

Judge Alex Williams – Will say that we are in full support of the legislation that the governor introduces. What can we do to get citizens apprised of issue? What can we do to get average citizens tuned in?

Greg Holmes – Use social media, but don’t make it political – it is a huge target and not making it political. Celinda Marsh – I’ve been getting involved with League of Women Voters and Common Cause Maryland. This is the first time since I get interested in redistricting reform. It feels like we are preaching to the choir on this issue. What is it going to take for our legislators to change their vote? How many people need to show up and participate in an Annapolis rally? When they show up, the delegates need to pay attention. What if 2000 people showed up that day. Where is the bar here? If we have 2000 people to show up on this day at this place in 2021, which is when we have to redraw the maps. We have to have our process in place way before 2021. If we have a specific event, we need to work together to plan. How many people need to show up? Need to tell people participating today that they can make that happen. Would motivate a lot more people.

Liz – The only people our legislators care about are special interest groups – challengers don’t matter. If we have the coalition that we know have a great. The most educated don’t have a voice.

Elizabeth Inclemen – With MAD (Make A Difference Mondays). Co-Chair of Unitarian church. Someone in my invisible group saw it on the google group. We're learning how to use social media to get people to come to events. You should use it too to get the message out. We're going to learn how to use other types of things. I learned about today's meeting from emails from organizations like the League of Women Voters. Please keep up the good work. It took a lot of people and a lot of work to get the fracking ban passed, so it will take a lot of people and work to get this passed. I moved here from Pennsylvania and someone from within our network was phone banking. It takes a lot of work and lots of networking.

James Dorwark – Candidate for District 3A, it's my belief if we had a commission meeting like this we know where they [Delegates/Senators] are and we can go to them in Annapolis. I think a commission meeting should be held before a joint committee during session. I am student here [at UB Law], and I didn't know about today's commission meeting. On keeping municipalities and subgroups together, District 3, which is Frederick County, there are at least three or more municipalities that are broken, and separated into three different districts. My question is how high of a priority is it for you? Where to get to know what district you are in. Some say "I'm in Liganore," but they don't know their own districts because Liganore is split between two legislative districts.

Walter – Frederick is among the most crazy lines. I have found area. Urbana is so unpredictable, still deciding. Tactics like depriving people of what distric they are in is a good first step.

Alex Williams – Let me simply add if you look at our report from 2015, it mentions this exact problem. If you can recognize political subdivisions

Ellen Green - With League of Women Voters of Baltimore City and also here as a private citizen. This present situation is an example of why we have this wide spread cynicism. There is a high level of cynicism among us, and look no further than redistricting. My own political preference would want me to have Democrats. If you want people to be turned off by the political system you have them look like the Maryland map. How can elected officials look at their constituents with these maps and say "Republicans do it too?" This is beyond Democratic values. This is an a very undemocratic process, and goes beyond what is good for Republicans and Democrats.

Jason Woisverty – Recently from Towson. Problems with multi-member districts legislative. You don't necessarily need to win; you just need to not lose. The size of multi-member districts allows gerrymandering to be much simpler and permits geographic gerrymandering. In Maryland it's even worse because you can split multi-member districts. If you are representing 7,500 people, you won't recognize people in your district. This allows unpopular incumbents to maintain their seats and it insulates them from criticism and accountability. I think the commission should focus on, put some attention on issue of multi-member districts. I think Governor Hogan should put attention on this. He could draw lines where more delegates win/lose.

Walter Olson – We have heard a lot of testimony where two or one districts should be eliminated. Baltimore City was listed as one. Those arguments were interesting too.

Gloria Johnson – Grew up in Baltimore City. My concern is not so much about single member, triple member districts, but the courts are mostly focusing on 1st Amendment concerns. In my neighborhood, most of the people look like me and are Democrats. In the neighborhood I live in, and what my neighbors are upset about Woodmore, a predominantly black neighborhood, our district was drawn right down the middle. Our neighborhood was put into Landover and Capital Heights and busts up a black voting-bloc. The racial implications are being pushed aside.

Alex William – I wanted to ask you a question. I live by you. How were you able to get notice of this event?

Gloria Johnson - In PG County, I do most of the forums and debates.

Alex Williams - Members of the commission I think were done for the hearing. We prepare to support governor and new bill we thank all of you for coming today.