

## **Washington Redistricting Commission**

***Your voice, your vote.  
Make it count!***

### **What is redistricting?**

Redistricting is the process of changing boundaries of voting districts so that all districts have the same number of people and keep intact groups that have minority interests in government. This is how we make sure that everyone has equal voting rights.

### **Why redistrict?**

As states and communities grow and change, peoples' representation in government begins to get out of balance. Redistricting brings everything back into balance to make sure that every Washingtonian is represented fairly in the state Legislature and the U.S. Congress. The U.S. and state constitutions require that each congressional and legislative district represent roughly equal numbers of people and keep intact groups with minority interests to ensure fair distribution of political power.

### **Has Washington always had a Redistricting Commission?**

No, the Legislature was in charge of redrawing the boundaries of Washington's voting districts until 1983. But it was not a fair process, so the voters of the state approved a constitutional amendment to give this authority to an independent Redistricting Commission. The first time the Commission redrew voting district boundaries was in 1991.

### **How are the commissioners appointed and who may serve?**

Every 10 years, following completion of the U.S. Census, the Redistricting Commission is formed. The commission has five members: two Democrats, two Republicans, and a non-partisan, non-voting Chair.

Each House and Senate caucus leader appoints one voting member to the commission in January. The four commission members, in turn, appoint a non-voting commission chairperson. A commissioner may be any registered state voter who meets the following requirements:

- Is not a current registered lobbyist, or former lobbyist within one year before appointment
- Is not a current elected official, or an elected state, district, or county party official
- Has not held such a position for two years prior to appointment.
- Will not campaign for elective office or actively participate in or contribute to a state or federal candidate running for office
- Will not campaign for a state legislative office or for Congress for two years after the new redistricting plan takes effect.

The 2011 redistricting project is the third time the Commission has formed for this task. The Commission is dissolved when the redistricting is done.

### **How many people will be in each district?**

The number of people per district is based on the 2010 Census. The census counted 6.7 million people living in Washington. Divided into 49 legislative districts, this means each district must, as nearly as can be done (or is “practicable”) have 137,235 people. Divided into ten congressional districts, this means each congressional district must have 672,454 people.

### **What criteria have to be considered in redrawing voting district boundaries?**

The criteria for redrawing boundaries are laid out in state and federal law. Voting district boundaries must be drawn to:

The criteria for redrawing boundaries are laid out in state and federal law. Voting district boundaries must be drawn to:

- Encompass, as nearly as can be done (or is “practicable”) equal numbers of people.
- Comply with the Voting Rights Act to ensure that minorities have an equal opportunity to elect representatives of their choice.
- Make sure that parts of a district are not physically separated.
- Make sure that, to the extent possible, boundaries of cities, counties, neighborhoods and communities that have common interests are respected, and their division minimized.
- Make sure they do not favor or discriminate against any incumbent, candidate, or political party.

### **What is reapportionment?**

- Reapportionment happens every 10 years to adjust congressional seats among the 50 states so everyone is fairly represented in the U.S. Congress. The U.S. Constitution requires that the U.S. House of Representatives have 435 seats divided between all 50 states. Each state receives at least one congressional seat. The remaining 385 are divided, or “apportioned” according to population. As the population of some states grows faster than that of others, congressional seats move from the slow-growing states to the fast-growing ones.
- The 2010 Census counted just over 6.7 million people living in Washington. With our significant growth, Washington will have a 10th congressional seat. The Redistricting Commission must draw the voting boundaries for this new congressional district.

### **How does the Commission adopt a redistricting plan? Can the plan be changed by the Legislature or vetoed by the Governor?**

- A redistricting plan must be approved by three of the four voting Commission members. This plan becomes final unless it is amended by the Legislature within 30 days after the beginning of the next regular or special session.
- By law, the new boundary lines can affect no more than 2 percent of a district’s population and must be approved by two-thirds of the members of each legislative chamber. The Governor may not veto the redistricting plan. There is no final vote of approval on the redistricting plan, and it takes effect 30 days after the legislative session begins. If the

commission fails to meet their submission deadline of January 1, 2012, the state Supreme Court must prepare a plan by March 1, 2012.

### **Why is the data from the U.S. Census used for redistricting in Washington State?**

- Census data is the most reliable information we have about population changes in the state. The U.S. Constitution also requires that the data come from the U.S. Census Bureau so that all the states are using information from the same source.

### **What laws address legislative and congressional redistricting?**

- U.S. Constitution
  - Article I, Section 2
- State Constitution
  - Article II, Section 43
    - Amendment to State Constitution
    - Adopted by voters in 1983
- State Legislation
  - 44.05 RCW (redistricting law)

### **How has redistricting changed over the years?**

- 1889 – State Constitution requires redistricting after each U.S. Census.
- 1931 – People complain that redistricting is not fair.
- 1954 League of Women Voters proposes a new way to redistrict. Passes, but lawmakers don't follow it.
- 1958 – League of Women Voters asks that state Constitution allow a commission to take over redistricting. Voters reject the amendment.
- 1960s – Federal Court takes over redistricting because Washington's way was discriminatory.
- 1970s – Federal judges say no more elections until redistricting is fixed.
- 1982 – The Legislature proposes a bill to create an independent, bipartisan redistricting committee
- 1983 – voters vote to amend the state Constitution to establish the Redistricting Commission
- 1991 – First Redistricting Commission gets a plan done by the constitutional deadline
- 2001 – Second Redistricting Commission gets a plan done by the constitutional deadline
- January 2011 – Third Redistricting Commission convenes.

### **How can I get involved in redistricting?**

- Send us your comments and insights about your community and what makes it whole
- Send us your idea of how voting district boundaries should be drawn in your community or throughout the state.
- Participate in a public forum. Visit our website to find out where and when. You can also participate via webcast.

### **How can I keep up to date on what is happening with redistricting?**

- Follow us on Twitter and Facebook
- Check in on our website regularly
- Watch for stories about our activities in the news.
- Join our LISTSERV
- Call or email us