



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

David J. Valesky

Senate Committee Approves Groundbreaking Independent Redistricting Legislation

DAVID J. VALESKY May 4, 2010

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ALBANY, N.Y.—The State Senate Investigations and Government Operations Committee approved independent redistricting reform legislation sponsored by Senator David J. Valesky (D-Oneida). This legislation would eliminate the practice of partisan gerrymandering of New York State Congressional, State Senate, and State Assembly districts, giving residents a clear voice in their representation.

"New York State residents have the right to a fair and nonpartisan redistricting process, in which they choose their elected officials and not vice versa," Senator Valesky said. "This legislation benefits all New Yorkers by eliminating partisan influence designed to preserve majorities and incumbents, and creating districts that are cohesive geographically and culturally."

Senate bill [S.1614A](#) passed the Investigations and Government Operations Committee today. Prior versions of independent redistricting plans have been introduced in the Senate and Assembly in the past five years, but did not advance.

This bill establishes a citizen reapportionment commission that draws maps for congressional and state legislative districts every 10 years following the U.S. Census. This independent commission would propose district boundaries and submit them to the Legislature for approval, in accordance with the State Constitution.

The district lines for all plans would be drawn to be compact, equal in population and contiguous; not abridge or deny minority voting rights; and align with local boundaries and community character to ensure the even-handed and non-partisan drawing of lines.

Independent commission members could not currently hold or, in the past two years, have held elective or public office, been a lobbyist, been in a position within a political party, or be a relative or spouse of an elected or public official.

The independent commission would replace the legislative task force on demographic research and reapportionment, made up six members, four of which are legislators.

The commission would hold public hearings throughout the state on the primary apportionment plan submitted to the Legislature, ensuring transparency and public input.

The process proposed in this bill is similar to the one successfully implemented in Iowa, and is supported by the leading good government organizations and reform advocates in New York, including former New York City Mayor Edward Koch.

A 2006 report by a coalition of these groups, "Unfair Advantage: New York State's Redistricting Process," said "American representative democracy is based on a system of 'one person, one vote.' However, New York State's redistricting system undermines that concept.

It is a system that cries out for change." The report may be viewed at:

<http://www.nypirg.org/goodgov/redistrictniReport4.20.06.pdf>

Assemblymember Michael Gianaris (D-Queens) is sponsoring same-as legislation in the Assembly (A.5279A).

For the full text of the bill, visit <http://www.nysenate.gov/legislation>.

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