



Redistricting 2011 – What You Need to Know

Overview

The release of the 2010 census triggers reapportionment and redistricting for Congressional seats and redistricting for House and Senate districts, county commissioner districts and other local government districts. This means every county must carefully review the new census data to determine whether the county commission districts currently meet constitutional guarantees or must be redrawn.

Why Do Counties Redistrict?

County commission districts are legally required to comply with the principle of “one person, one vote.” Districts must be drawn to have as nearly equal population as possible. Doing so ensures the voting strength of citizens living in one district is not greater than the voting strength of citizens in another simply because of the population of the district. Another reason counties may redistrict is to protect the voting strength of minority populations and comply with the federal Voting Rights Act. Consultation with the county attorney will be crucial in determining whether the county meets these standards.

How Does A County Redistrict?

The first step is to determine if a county must redistrict. This will depend on demographic changes in the county. In order to access the data needed for that determination, commissioners should request a member of the county’s legislative delegation to initiate contact with the General Assembly’s Legislative and Congressional Reapportionment Office. The office can then provide data, maps (at actual cost), and other information about the procedures necessary to redistrict. The process should include the county attorney in all phases and may provide opportunities for public input. The redistricting of county commission seats can only occur through local legislation. Where a county pursues redistricting and a new plan is passed, the redistricting plan must be submitted to the United States Department of Justice for preclearance. Once preclearance is received, the new districts take effect for the next election cycle.

What Should I Do Next?

Counties should act expeditiously to begin the redistricting review process. Consult with your county attorney and schedule an appointment through a member of your county’s legislative delegation with the Georgia General Assembly’s Legislative and Congressional Reapportionment Office. A legislator’s authorization (either via email, letter, telephone call or in person) is necessary for the office to begin working with a county. Depending on whether or not the Governor includes local redistricting bills in the call for the August special session, counties who have completed their redistricting plans prior to August 15th may be able to pass their plan in August. If not ready, or if local bills are not included in the call, the next opportunity for counties to redistrict will be the 2012 session of the General Assembly.

Local Redistricting Contact in the State Reapportionment Office

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