

WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE

2021 REGULAR SESSION

Introduced

House Bill 2996

FISCAL
NOTE

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[Introduced March 09, 2021; Referred to the
Committee on Government Organization then the
Judiciary then Finance]

1 A BILL to amend the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, by adding thereto a new section,
2 designated §1-2-2a, relating to creating the Independent Redistricting Commission;
3 designating duties of the commission; providing that members are nominated by State
4 Election Commission; setting forth required traits and restrictions of members; providing
5 for how commission members are appointed; setting forth a process for determining the
6 chair of the commission; providing for the filling of vacancies of commission; requiring
7 members to conduct an organizational meeting and select a vice chairperson; providing
8 for the removal of a member for cause; providing for the filling of vacancies that may occur
9 on commission; setting forth certain requirements of the commission; providing that three
10 members constitute a quorum; providing that members are ineligible for public office or
11 registration as paid lobbyist for three years after completing their last term on commission;
12 requiring that commission plan and propose congressional and legislative districts;
13 providing specific criteria that commission must observe in proposing district mappings;
14 requiring commission to advertise a proposed draft map of districts to the public; permitting
15 legislators to make inquiry of commission members regarding their methodology and
16 proposed redistrict mapping; requiring that commission publish its proposals for district
17 boundaries; requiring the commission to recommend redistricting plans to the Legislature;
18 authorizing a vote on the plans in an extraordinary session called by the Governor;
19 requiring the full Legislature to vote on the first proposal plan ratification without
20 amendment; setting forth a process for subsequent proposed plans, amendment
21 restrictions, and vote requirements; authorizing the West Virginia Supreme Court of
22 Appeals to make the final determination between three plans proposed by the
23 Independent Redistricting Commission if the Legislature and Governor cannot agree;
24 requiring that the commission certify to Secretary of State that its proposals for district
25 boundaries is in accordance with constitutional and legal requirements; providing for
26 reimbursement of expenses and per diem allowances for commission members;

27 authorizing the commission to contract for staffing and consultants; providing
28 administrative assistance to the commission from the Joint Committee on Government
29 and Finance upon request; prohibiting certain persons from influencing or attempting to
30 influence district mapping proposals of the commission; and providing for the expiration of
31 commission appointments.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

ARTICLE 2. APPORTIONMENT OF REPRESENTATION.

§1-2-2a. Independent Redistricting Commission to study and propose fair, balanced and rational plan to redistrict.

1 (a) There is hereby created the Independent Redistricting Commission, which shall be
2 appointed in accordance with the procedures set forth in this section to study population trends
3 and present proposed redistricting mappings, designed to reflect fair reapportionment and
4 redistricting in conformity with constitutional principles, especially that which requires equality of
5 population to the greatest extent practicable. Commission members shall be knowledgeable and
6 possess expertise relative to constitutional and legal requirements and considerations which bear
7 on the issue of fair reapportionment and redistricting.

8 (b) By July 1, 2021, and thereafter, by February 28 of each year that ends in one, an
9 Independent Redistricting Commission shall be established to provide for proposed redistricting
10 of congressional and state legislative districts. The Independent Redistricting Commission
11 consists of five members. No more than two members of the Independent Redistricting
12 Commission may be members of the same political party. No more than two members may reside
13 in the same county. Each member shall be a registered West Virginia voter who has been
14 continuously registered with the same political party or registered as unaffiliated with a political
15 party for three or more years immediately preceding appointment, who is committed to applying
16 the provisions of this section in an honest, independent and impartial fashion and to upholding
17 public confidence in the integrity of the redistricting process. Within the three years previous to

18 appointment, members may not have been appointed to, elected to, or a candidate for any other
19 public office and may not have served as an officer of a political party, a registered paid lobbyist,
20 an officer of a candidate's campaign committee, or an officer of a political action committee.

21 (c) The State Election Commission shall nominate candidates for appointment to the
22 Independent Redistricting Commission.

23 (d) By 30 days after the enactment of this section, and thereafter, by January 8 of years
24 ending in one, the State Election Commission shall establish a pool of persons who are willing to
25 serve on and are qualified for appointment to the Independent Redistricting Commission. The
26 pool of candidates shall consist of 25 nominees, with 10 nominees from each of the two largest
27 political parties in West Virginia based on party registration, and five who are not registered with
28 either of the two largest political parties in West Virginia.

29 (e) Appointments to the Independent Redistricting Commission shall be made in the order
30 set forth below. No later than 45 days after the enactment of this section, and thereafter, no later
31 than January 31 of years ending in one, the Speaker of the House of Delegates shall make one
32 appointment to the Independent Redistricting Commission from the pool of nominees, followed
33 by one appointment from the pool made in turn by each of the following: The minority party leader
34 of the House of Delegates, the President of the Senate and the minority party leader of the Senate.
35 Each official shall have a seven-day period in which to make an appointment. Any official who
36 fails to make an appointment within the specified time period will forfeit the appointment privilege.
37 In the event that there are two or more minority parties within the House of Delegates or the
38 Senate, the leader of the largest minority party by statewide party registration shall make the
39 appointment.

40 (f) Any vacancy in the above four Independent Redistricting Commission positions
41 remaining as of 60 days after the enactment of this section, and thereafter, after March 1 of a year
42 ending in one shall be filled from the pool of nominees by the State Election Commission or its
43 designee. The appointing body shall strive for political balance and fairness.

44 (g) At a meeting called by the Secretary of State by August 1, 2021, and thereafter, by
45 April 1 in each year that ends in one, the four Independent Redistricting Commission members
46 shall meet and conduct an organizational meeting, which will constitute the commencement of
47 their official duties, and at which the commission will select by majority vote from the nomination
48 pool a fifth member who is not registered with any party already represented on the Independent
49 Redistricting Commission and who shall serve as chair. If the four commissioners fail to appoint
50 a fifth member within 15 days, the State Election Commission or its designee, striving for political
51 balance and fairness, shall appoint a fifth member from the nomination pool who is not registered
52 with any party already represented on the Independent Redistricting Commission and who shall
53 serve as chair.

54 (h) The five commissioners shall then select by majority vote one of their members to
55 serve as vice-chair.

56 (i) After having been served written notice and provided with an opportunity for a response,
57 a member of the Independent Redistricting Commission may be removed by the Governor, with
58 the concurrence of two thirds of the Senate, for substantial neglect of duty, gross misconduct in
59 office, or inability to discharge the duties of office.

60 (j) If a commissioner or chairperson does not complete the term of office for any reason,
61 the State Election Commission or its designee shall nominate a pool of three candidates within
62 the first 30 days after the vacancy occurs. The nominees shall be of the same political party or
63 status as was the member who vacated the office at the time of his or her appointment, and the
64 appointment other than the chair shall be made by the current holder of the office designated to
65 make the original appointment. The appointment of a new chair shall be made by the remaining
66 commissioners. If the appointment of a replacement commissioner or chair is not made within 14
67 days following the presentation of the nominees, the State Election Commission or its designee
68 shall make the appointment, striving for political balance and fairness. The newly appointed
69 commissioner shall serve out the remainder of the original term.

70 (k) Three commissioners, including the chair or vice-chair, constitute a quorum. Three or
71 more affirmative votes are required for any official action. Where a quorum is present, the
72 Independent Redistricting Commission shall conduct business in meetings open to the public,
73 with 48 or more hours of public notice provided.

74 (l) A commissioner, during the commissioner's term of office and for three years thereafter,
75 is ineligible for public office or for registration as a paid lobbyist.

76 (m) The Independent Redistricting Commission shall plan and propose congressional and
77 legislative districts. The commencement of the proposed mapping process for both the
78 congressional and legislative districts shall be the creation of districts of equal population in a
79 grid-like pattern across the state. Adjustments to the grid shall then be made as necessary to
80 accommodate the goals as set forth below:

81 (1) Districts shall comply with the United States Constitution and the United States Voting
82 Rights Act;

83 (2) Congressional districts shall have equal population to the extent practicable, and state
84 legislative districts shall have equal population to the extent practicable;

85 (3) Districts shall be geographically compact and contiguous to the extent practicable;

86 (4) To the extent practicable, district lines shall use visible geographic features, city, town
87 and county boundaries, and undivided census tracts; and

88 (5) To the extent practicable, competitive districts should be favored where to do so would
89 create no significant detriment to the other goals.

90 (n) Party registration and voting history data shall be excluded from the initial phase of the
91 mapping process but may be used to test maps for compliance with the above goals. The places
92 of residence of incumbents or candidates may not be identified or considered.

93 (o) The Independent Redistricting Commission shall advertise a proposed draft map of
94 congressional districts and a proposed draft map of legislative districts to the public for comment,
95 which comment shall be taken for at least 30 days. During the public comment period, the

96 commission shall hold three public hearings in geographically distinct areas of the state to present
97 the plan and hear public comments. Any member of either body of the Legislature may, within the
98 public comment period, make inquiry of the Independent Redistricting Commission concerning its
99 methodology or proposed redistrict mapping, which inquiry shall be fully addressed by the
100 Independent Redistricting Commission. After conclusion of the public comment period:

101 (1) The Independent Redistricting Commission shall then make and publish its first
102 proposal for district boundaries and recommend the plan to the Legislature, which shall vote,
103 during an extraordinary session called by the Governor, upon it after an explanation of the
104 proposal on the floors of the House of Delegates and Senate. Amendments to the first proposal
105 are not in order in either the House or the Senate. The Senate and House of Delegates shall take
106 a separate vote on the plans for the congressional allocation, the House of Delegates allocation,
107 and the Senate allocation. If any plans pass, they shall be presented to the Governor for his or
108 her signature in the same manner as all pieces of legislation adopted by the Legislature.

109 (2) If any of the first proposal plans fail to obtain approval of the Senate, the House of
110 Delegates and the Governor, then the Independent Redistricting Commission shall meet and
111 confer in order to propose a second proposal to the Legislature. The second proposal shall follow
112 the same proposed draft plan and public comment requirements contained in this subsection.
113 The Independent Redistricting Commission shall then make and publish its second proposal for
114 district boundaries that were not approved by the Legislature in the first proposal. The Legislature
115 shall vote, during an extraordinary session called by the Governor, upon the second proposal
116 after an explanation of the proposal on the floors of the House of Delegates and Senate.
117 Amendments to the second proposal are not in order in either the House or the Senate. The
118 Senate and House of Delegates shall take a separate vote on any plans not approved in the first
119 proposal. If any plans pass, they shall be presented to the Governor for his or her signature in the
120 same manner as all pieces of legislation adopted by the Legislature.

121 (3) If any of the second proposal plans fail to obtain approval of the Senate, the House of

122 Delegates and the Governor, then the Independent Redistricting Commission shall meet and
123 confer in order to propose a third proposal to the Legislature. The third proposal shall follow the
124 same proposed draft plan and public comment requirements contained in this subsection. The
125 Independent Redistricting Commission shall then make and publish its third proposal for district
126 boundaries that were not approved by the Legislature in the first proposal. The Legislature shall
127 vote, during an extraordinary session called by the Governor, upon the third proposal after an
128 explanation of the proposal on the floors of the House of Delegates and Senate. The members of
129 the House of Delegates and Senate may vote to amend the third proposal. The Senate and House
130 of Delegates shall take a separate vote on any plans not approved in the first or second proposal.
131 If any plans pass, they shall be presented to the Governor for his or her signature in the same
132 manner as any other legislation adopted by the Legislature.

133 (4) If any of the third proposal plans fail to obtain approval of the Senate, the House of
134 Delegates and the Governor, then the first, second and third proposal plans that were not adopted
135 shall be presented to the Supreme Court of Appeals. The Supreme Court of Appeals shall choose,
136 by majority vote, between the three proposals from the Independent Redistricting Commission
137 without any possibility of amending any of the three plans or incorporating any amendments that
138 were proposed in the Senate or House of Delegates on the third proposal. The selection of the
139 Supreme Court of Appeals shall be final, subject to judicial review, and the Legislature may not
140 make any amendment to the final adopted plan until the Independent Redistricting Commission
141 proposes new plans during the next year that ends in one.

142 (p) The provisions regarding this section are self-executing. The Independent Redistricting
143 Commission shall certify to the Secretary of State that its proposals for district boundaries of
144 congressional and legislative districts are in accordance with those constitutional and legal
145 requirements and considerations as provided in this section.

146 (q) Each member of the Independent Redistricting Commission shall be reimbursed for all
147 reasonable and necessary expenses incurred in the performance of his or her duties as a member

148 of the commission and shall receive a per diem allowance equivalent to the per diem received by
149 members of the Legislature for each full work day actually engaged in the performance of his or
150 her duties as required by this section. Members shall keep expense vouchers and time sheets
151 demonstrating dates and times in which they are engaged fulfilling required obligations as well as
152 a description of the specific activity in which they are engaged. Seven hours of related work and
153 activity shall constitute payment for one day. Payment based on less than seven hours shall be
154 prorated in an appropriate proportionate manner. The Legislature shall make the necessary
155 appropriations by a majority vote to fund the activities of the Independent Redistricting
156 Commission.

157 (r) The Independent Redistricting Commission, with fiscal oversight from the Department
158 of Administration, shall have procurement and contracting authority and may hire staff and
159 consultants in order to accomplish the purposes of this section.

160 (s) Upon request from the Independent Redistricting Commission, the Joint Committee on
161 Government and Finance shall provide the commission with administrative assistance and
162 facilities, including staffing and technical assistance, office space and other equipment, services,
163 supplies and other resources necessary for the commission to perform its duties until such time
164 as the commission is able obtain adequate resources to perform its duties from moneys
165 appropriated by the Legislature for such purposes.

166 (t) No elected or appointed office holder, lobbyist, official of a political party, or other person
167 affiliated with an elected or appointed office holder, lobbyist or official of a political party, may
168 influence or attempt to influence the district-mapping proposals of the Independent Redistricting
169 Commission.

170 (u) Each commissioner's duties established by this section expire upon the completion of
171 redistricting. The Independent Redistricting Commission may not meet or incur expenses after
172 the proposed redistricting plan is completed, except if litigation or government approval of the plan
173 is pending, or to revise districts if required by court decisions or if the number of congressional or

174 legislative districts is changed.

NOTE: The purpose of this bill is to provide for an Independent Redistricting Commission to propose redistricting plans during census years. The commission consists of five members who are initially nominated by the State Election Commission. The actual appointments are made by the leaders of both houses of the Legislature and by the first four commission members selected. The commission's main task is to propose plans to the Legislature based on constitutional and legal requirements and considerations and which is removed from stark political aspirations or concerns. The bill provides that commission members receive remuneration and reimbursement of expenses associated with their work. The bill also requires that the commission publish their proposal to the public at large, fully address any legislator's questions before issuing a final draft proposal and submitting the plan to the full body of the Legislature for its action. The bill allows for multiple plans, if the Legislature or Governor reject a plan. The bill gives the Supreme Court of Appeals the final decision if the Legislature and Governor cannot agree on three potential plans.

Strike-throughs indicate language that would be stricken from a heading or the present law and underscoring indicates new language that would be added.