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# Louisiana House approves Congress map with 1 majority Black district

Republican-drawn proposal 'honors traditional boundaries,' co-sponsor says

BY: **WESLEY MULLER** - FEBRUARY 10, 2022 6:53 PM

EXHIBIT
GX-13

The Louisiana House of Representatives, photographed Feb. 2, 2022. (Greg LaRose/Louisiana Illuminator)

Lawmakers in the Louisiana House of Representatives approved a congressional redistricting bill Thursday that maintains the status quo of one majority-Black district and five White districts in the U.S. House. Census numbers show Black residents comprise one-third of the state's population.

The map next heads to the Senate, where a similar bill originated and has already been advanced.

House Bill 1 was approved in a 70-33 vote. All but two Republicans voted in favor of the proposal: Reps. Beryl Amedee of Houma and Blake Miguez of Erath. Democrats Travis Johnson of Vidalia and Francis Thompson of Delhi broke away from their party and supported the bill, along with independents Roy Daryl Adams of Jackson, Joe Marino of Gretna and Malinda White of Bogalusa.

The 70-vote margin would indicate the House could override a veto should Gov. John Bel Edwards, a Democrat, choose to reject the bill. The governor has said he supports additional minority districts but has yet to say whether he will exercise his veto power in redistricting.

House Speaker Pro Tempore Tanner Magee, R-Houma, handled the proposal on the floor Thursday for its lead author, House Speaker Clay Schexnayder, R-Gonzales. Democrats in the chamber grilled Magee over the lack of a second majority-minority district.

Rep. Denise Marcelle, D-Baton Rouge, asked Magee if any attempt was made to draw a second majority-minority district. Magee said factors considered for the new district lines included communities of interest, population shifts and geography. A priority was to ensure the proposed map "honors traditional boundaries," he said.

Rep. Wilford Carter, D-Lake Charles, who is Black, said the federal Voting Rights Act doesn't force lawmakers to create a second majority-Black district, but it does require them to make an effort to draw a district that gives minorities an opportunity to elect a candidate of their choice.

Wilford said the House Bill 1 map is "totally illegal" because no attempt was made to draw a second majority-minority district.

Magee disagreed, saying he believes the map is legal based on feedback and analysis he absorbed throughout the redistricting process, including a statewide "roadshow" with public hearings before the special legislative session.

Democrats made multiple attempts to add a second majority-minority congressional district through floor amendments, but each failed against the overwhelming Republican majority.

"It is clear that there was no attempt to create a second majority-minority district," Marcelle said while proposing one such amendment that failed in a 30-71 vote.

Similar attempts were made in the Senate, where a comparable bill with one minority district was approved.

Miguez voted against the proposed map because splits St. Mary and St. Martin parishes between the 3rd and 6th Congressional districts. Miguez, who represents those areas, said his constituents are not happy with the proposal.

Amedee opposed the same split in St. Mary Parish, specifically in Morgan City where three precincts were put into a different district from the rest of the city.

Black lawmakers and voter advocacy groups have called on lawmakers to draw a second majority-minority congressional district since 2020 Census figures were released last year. Those numbers show Louisiana's white population decreased 6.3% and its Black and mixed-Black population increased 3.8% since 2010. Currently, only one of Louisiana's six congressional districts has a minority representative, Congressman Troy Carter, D-New Orleans.

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*An earlier version of this story included the incorrect hometown for House Speaker Clay Schexnayder.*

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Wes Muller traces his journalism roots back to 1997 when, at age 13, he built and launched a hyper-local news website for his New Orleans neighborhood. In the years since then, he has freelanced for the Times-Picayune in New Orleans and worked on staff at the Sun Herald in Biloxi, WAFB-9News CBS in Baton Rouge, and the Enterprise-Journal in McComb, Mississippi. He also taught English as an adjunct instructor at Baton Rouge Community College. Much of his journalism has involved reporting on First Amendment issues and coverage of municipal and state government. He has received recognitions including McClatchy's National President's Award, the Associated Press Freedom of Information Award, and the Daniel M. Phillips Freedom of Information Award from the Mississippi Press Association, among others. Muller is a New Orleans native, a Jesuit High School alumnus, a University of New Orleans alumnus and a veteran U.S. Army paratrooper. He lives in Ponchatoula, Louisiana, with his two sons and his wife, who is also a journalist.

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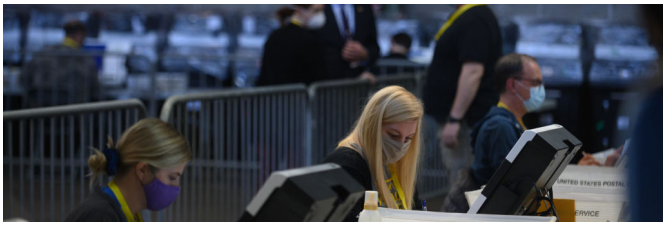

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