Exhibit 9

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House Panel Approves New District Plans for State Senate and Executive Council

By **GARRY RAYNO, InDepthNH.org** April 14, 2022

Screenshot

Sen. James Gray, R-Rochester, explains Senate Bills 240 and 241 to the House Special Committee on Redistricting Thursday.

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CONCORD — Despite universal testimony in opposition Thursday, the Republican majority on the House Special Committee on Redistricting approved new state Senate and Executive Council districts.

The committee votes on Senate Bill 240, the state Senate district maps, and Senate Bill 241, the Executive Council district maps, were down party lines 8-7.

Democrats tried to amend the Executive Council map to one proposed by Senate Democrats, but that was voted down 8-7.

In moving to pass the two bills, Republican members of the committee noted the bills met all constitutional, federal and state legal requirements and were well within the allowable population deviations.

Rep. Connie Lane, D-Concord, said they should strive to do better than meet the population and legal requirements in redrawing the districts.

“If we are truly concerned about election integrity, we should focus on more than just the security measures we have been putting in,” she said. “Voters need to know when they go into the voting booth they have a choice and it will matter.

“We could have done a better job and we should have done a better job.”

During the public hearings, bill opponents lamented that partisan gerrymandered districts drawn 10 years ago were made even more partisan by the Senate approved maps for the State Senate and the Executive Council.

Many testifying argued the district maps should reflect the partisan divide of voters which is evenly split between Democrats and Republicans, but noted the new maps will produce a Senate with at least 15 Republican senators and an Executive Council with Republicans filling four of the five seats.

“These maps don’t take into consideration what is best for the majority of voters in New Hampshire,” said Olivia Zink, executive director of Open Democracy, “the undeclared voters.”

She and others told the committee the new districts for both the Senate and Executive Council will disenfranchise voters for both parties and discourage people from casting their vote because they know it would not make a difference.

The maps were defended by Sen. James Gray, R-Rochester, who is the chair of the Senate Election Law Committee.

He said the focus is the constitutional obligation of equal districts, “population, population, population.”
Gray claimed the process was impacted by the redrawing of Nashua Wards with an 8 percent population deviation and Manchester wanting to retain three state Senators when their population is almost perfect for two senators.

He said the urban areas often have been grouped with surrounding communities that has given cities an advantage.

Gray said the population has shifted in the state so the North Country has fewer people and the growth has been in the southern sector which required some significant changes.

You can draw a thousand maps, but decisions have to be made, he said, noting they considered what they heard in the 10 public hearings around the state, like Sullivan County communities wanting to be associated with Vermont.

Committee member Rep. Lucy Weber, D-Walpole, asked what Vermont had to do with drawing the political maps for New Hampshire.

She said the Senate map was “the very essence of gerrymandering,” noting District 9 is a line of single towns running 73 miles from Bedford to Hinsdale and is decidedly more Republican than it is now.

“You can tear any map apart and cast aspersions on it and say it’s gerrymandered,” he said. “You draw a map and let me take pot shots at it, I can do the same.”
Lane asked if he took incumbents into account in drawing the maps and he said absolutely.

She asked why that is not a problem with an earlier proposed Congressional district map that would have pitted the two incumbent Democratic U.S. House members against each other.

Gray said Senate incumbents have to live in the districts they represent, but not for Congressional districts, noting Bernie Sanders’ son ran in the Congressional district he does not live in in a past election.

A number of speakers focused on the changes made to Senate districts 9 and 10, which switched some Democratic leaning towns from district 9 to district 10 and a Republican leaning town from 10 to 9, making 10 much more Democratic and 9 much more Republican.

Weber wondered what the town of Hinsdale has in common with the more populous area around Bedford, a suburb of Manchester. “That is halfway across the state,” she noted.

Others said the plans for both the state Senate and Executive Council did not serve the state well and instead were designed with an eye on retaining party power and not the voters.

“The voices of voters matter, a large number do not think these are fair,” said Linda Bundy of Antrim. “These do not serve granite staters well.”

The League of Women Voters NH president Liz Tentarelli of Newbury said she was very discouraged by the two maps before the committee.

She said after Republicans initially proposed not changing the Executive Council districts, she heard they were going to be changed.

“I said how much worse can they make it,” she said. “This is worse.”

She said while Gray said they kept incumbents in mind when they were drawing the maps, they did not see fit to consider a person who held the District 1 council seat two years ago and moved him from District 1 to District 2.

“Next fall the one opportunity to have your vote count in some of these districts will be in the primary (with low turnout),” Tentarelli said. “I want all voters to have their voices heard and want those votes to count in the general election.”

Frank Knaack, policy director of the American Civil Liberties Union NH, said an independent analysis his organization commissioned shows some of the changes packed significantly more Democrats in some districts, than Republicans in districts with an advantage for that party.

He said analysis of the new Executive Council map is not finished but the same appears to be true of the District 2 seat with even more Democrats than before making the other four districts more Republican leaning.

“You could not ask for a better example of politicians picking their voters,” Knaack said, “and not the other way around.”

Former teacher David Erickson of Weare said he was outraged listening to Gray’s testimony asserting he had to count to 13 to get a majority in the Senate. “He was counting to 15 at least,” he said about the potential outcome under the new plan.

“Please vote against these gerrymandered maps,” Erickson said, “and give us a fair shot so we are all fairly represented.”

The House will take up the bills later this month and if approved they will go to Gov. Chris Sununu.

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