
County political maps voted down

Democrats say plan would dilute minority representation

By Steve Hughes

ALBANY — The Albany County Legislature voted down proposed new lines for all 39 elected districts, with Democratic leaders saying the proposed changes would have diluted representation for voters of color.

The vote was 24 to 15 Monday to

reject the suggested new districts, which will be sent back to the county's redistricting commission for possible changes. Six Democrats, including Gil Ethier of Cohoes and Nathan Bruschi of Colonie, voted in favor of the new maps, as did all nine Republicans.

"I don't believe we should choose our voters, I believe our voters should

choose us," Bruschi said.

In a statement before his vote, Ethier said that in his four decades in the legislature, this reapportionment process was the best he had seen.

Redistricting has been a fraught process in the county. The legislature created the independent redistricting process in 2019 after the county was successfully sued for failing to properly

Please see **MAPS A7** ►

Leaders: Minority representation diluted

MAPS

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account for the growth of minority residents in the city of Albany in its 1990, 2000 and 2010 redistricting processes.

"While I understand and respect the view of some members that the process could've been better, I think it's clear the difference made by the commission far surpassed anything previously done in the past," Ethier said.

It's the second time this week that a county faced disputes over the creation of new lines. Ulster County faces the possibility of legal action after its commission that created its legislature districts did not follow new state rules that dictate population variations in each district.

The proposed maps did not shrink the Albany County Legislature, which is the largest in the state. Instead, the districts were shaped to shift the districts based on population changes recorded by the 2020 U.S. census while ensuring fair representation for residents of color. The county has faced and lost lawsuits for previous redistricting plans that diluted the power of minority voters.

The decision to vote against the proposed lines was mainly based on two factors, according to a letter sent to the commission signed by Chairman Andrew Joyce, Majority Leader Dennis Feeney and William Clay, the chair-

man of the Legislative Black Caucus.

In it, the three Democratic leaders said the commission's decision to create two new potential majority-minority districts in the city of Albany spreads minority voters too thin across seven districts, potentially making them weak and ineffective. The city currently has five majority-minority districts.

In two of the proposed seven districts, the percentage of voting-age

Black and Hispanic residents does not reach 50 percent, making them pluralities, rather than majorities.

Minority voters would be better served if, instead, those districts were more concentrated, even if it meant reducing the number of proposed majority-minority districts, they wrote.

"These communities of color are better served if the minority voting populations therein are not spread so thin and instead

are more cohesive, unified and better able to represent the needs of their residents," the letter says.

The legislative leaders also urged the commission to take into account population shifts in the city since the 2020 census, something the commission can't do under the law.

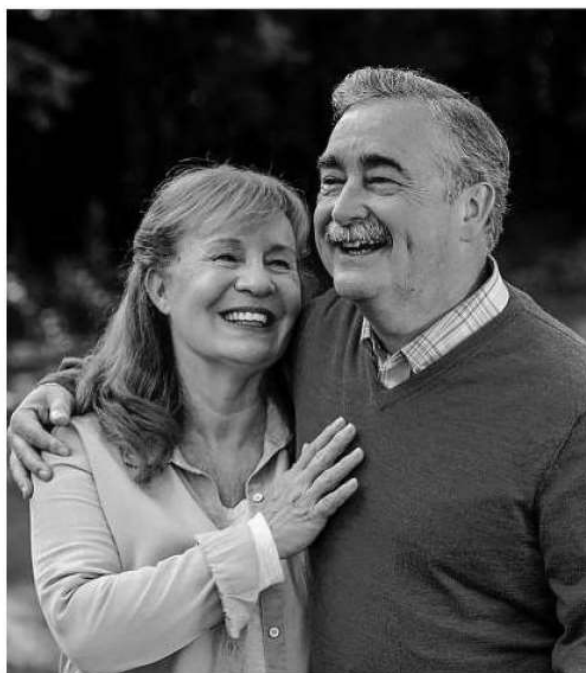
Legislators had voiced their concerns about the proposed maps in the weeks leading up to the commission's final public hearing over the summer.

The proposed maps move some of the legislative districts in ways that will force veteran Democrats in the city to primary each other. Legislators also were concerned that neighborhoods and communities that were long tied together were split into separate legislative districts.

The "legislature recommends that the Albany County Redistricting Commission and the Majority-Minority District Subcommittee re-review

the maps to determine how communities of color can be better served by creating more cohesive and unified districts," it said in a statement.

The redistricting commission in its final report to the legislature, however, noted that population and demographic shifts throughout the county made it difficult for existing lines to remain in place while pursuing opportunities to expand the number of majority-minority districts.



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