

Legislative Redistricting Sioux Falls Subcommittee

09/28/21 Report



Subcommittee Assignment

The Legislative Redistricting Sioux Falls Subcommittee is one of three subcommittees formed by the House Legislative Redistricting Committee and the Senate Legislative Redistricting Committee to address redistricting within certain areas within the state.

Background

The subcommittee held a meeting on September 28, 2021, to provide an opportunity for the public to comment on the redistricting process, and specifically, the proposed conurbation plans for the greater Sioux Falls area.

Members Present

Members of the subcommittee present were Senator Jim Bolin, Co-Chair; Representatives Hansen and Soye, and Senators Crabtree and Schoenfish.

Summary of the Meeting

The subcommittee opened the meeting with an overview of the reasons for redistricting and some of the guidelines and laws that dictate the process.

Several testifiers followed, expressing support for keeping all of Minnehaha and northern Lincoln county in the final greater Sioux Falls conurbation area. They based their support on the interconnected nature of the area and collaboration between local governments, businesses, and government service. Some testifiers also highlighted the growth of the region and several urban areas, citing that as further reason to keep the area whole as the growth continues over the next decade.

The majority of testifiers supported a conurbation area that would focus more on the urban area of Sioux Falls, separating it from the more rural parts of the counties. Most expressed that districts within Minnehaha County should be separated into urban and rural districts. Because urban and rural voters have different priorities and needs, they stated, districts that reflect those differences would help to ensure that both would have a voice in the Legislature.

Some of the testifiers highlighted the impacts of agriculture, lack of broadband access, and lower access to resources in the more rural parts of Minnehaha versus the traffic and commerce challenges, and greater access to resources, in the urban parts of Minnehaha and Lincoln counties. These differences make it challenging for a representative to represent both sides and have both their best interests at heart, they stated.

Several testifiers also expressed concern that if a rural/urban divide is not respected, a large majority of legislators could come from just a few cities, ignoring large parts of the state.

Additionally, many testifiers expressed concern over gerrymandering, including the shapes of some of the current districts, and encouraged the committee to adopted districts with straight, clean lines and compact shapes. A few encouraged the subcommittee to not use redistricting as a weapon to edge out certain legislators or benefit certain political parties.

A few testifiers encouraged the committee to think large or think small. Allowing for a large conurbation area provides for more options within the area. A small area allows for more options in the rest of the state. Trying to split the difference could result in less options for both.

Listing of Staff Members

Staff members for the subcommittee were Jeff Mehlhaff, Chief Fiscal Analyst; and Matt Frame, Legislative Attorney.

