

New Jersey State Commission of Investigation



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SCI FINDS CONGRESSIONAL REDISTRICTING PROCESS IN NEW JERSEY NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

TRENTON – New Jersey’s system for congressional redistricting generally works but requires reform to make the mapmaking process more transparent, consistent and less vulnerable to charges of manipulation for political purposes, the State Commission of Investigation (SCI) found in a report released today.

The SCI launched an inquiry into the process concluded in January 2022 by the New Jersey Congressional Redistricting Commission after receiving allegations of impropriety in the development and selection of a final map serving the state’s voters in United States House of Representative elections for the next decade. Among the most

serious of the claims questioning the integrity of the process was the improper manipulation of the data used by the commission to carry out its mapmaking work.

After reviewing hundreds of pages of documentary evidence and receiving sworn testimony from more than a dozen individuals directly involved in the state's latest redistricting cycle, the SCI found no merit to the unspecified claims of data manipulation. However, there were circumstances where the process lacked transparency, uniformity and statutory guidance in specific areas needed to ensure the reliable operation of the commission, its duties and the mapmaking responsibilities assigned to it.

New Jersey is among a select group of states that relies on a commission of political appointees to draw the lines of the state's congressional voting map. The state's process allows for a 13-member commission comprised of six Democratic delegates, six Republican delegates and one independent member serving as the panel's chair. During the most recent cycle, Chair John E. Wallace Jr., a former Supreme Court Justice, chose the Democrat's map after the commission vote ended in a tie. Some Republican delegates questioned that decision and the overall fairness of the process.

The SCI found no lack of fairness in the process, but did see a need for greater transparency and uniformity to avoid even the appearance that the redistricting selection process might be unfair.

"Collectively, these findings demonstrate that New Jersey's system for congressional redistricting – an undertaking that cost state taxpayers \$1.4 million in the last cycle – has ample room for improvement," the report states.

To improve the system, the SCI recommended the adoption of statutory language specifying the duties and authority of the commission chair, a role charged with overseeing an inherently political and often contentious experience. There should also be legal guidance concerning the retention and use of outside consultants called on to assist in redistricting. The criteria that drive the creation of voting districts should also be codified into law to help promote transparency and consistency in the mapmaking process. Additionally, the SCI recommended establishing a mandate compelling the two delegations to share maps and offer critiques on the other side's proposal before the commission votes on a final map. The final maps created by each delegation should also be posted online for public review before the vote.



The State Commission of Investigation is an independent New Jersey watchdog agency established in 1968 to investigate organized crime and corruption, waste of tax money and other abuses of the public trust. Copies of public reports are available at the Commission's offices or via its Web site at www.state.nj.us/sci.