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PA Commonwealth Court Judge Begins Review to Pick New Congressional District Maps

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Pennsylvania Commonwealth Judge McCullough launched a review of competing proposals to redraw the boundaries of the state's congressional districts. Gov. Tom Wolf vetoed a plan sent to him by Republican lawmakers. Judge Patricia McCullough warned the parties the hearing could go into the weekend, reflecting the pressure to draw new boundaries for 17 congressional districts in time for the May 17 primary election.

Because of gridlock in the statehouse, McCullough has to consider at least a dozen different proposed maps that must account for demographic shifts over the past decade in the politically divided state. Complicating the matter is Pennsylvania's loss of a congressional seat because the state grew more slowly than the rest of the country since 2010, according to U.S. Census findings. The hearing began with brief arguments from parties backing their own proposals, including Wolf, Democratic and Republican lawmakers and others.

Wolf vetoed the plan that passed the Republican-controlled Legislature with every Democratic lawmaker opposing it. In his veto message, he argued that the legislation "fails the test of fundamental fairness."

McCullough, an elected Republican judge, could pick a plan or recommend one, but any decision she makes is more than likely to be appealed to the PA state Supreme Court, where Democrats currently hold a 5-2 majority. Robert Tucker, a lawyer for House Republican leaders, told McCullough the map passed by the Legislature was fair to both parties. McCullough should defer to the General Assembly, Tucker said.

"This court need not and should not turn this into a beauty contest of selecting the prettiest map," Tucker said, saying "fair is in the eye of the beholder and determined by how you define 'fair.'" The Senate Democrats' lawyer, Marco Attisano, described the vetoed map as the product of a failed legislative process. "They're asking you to promote the Legislature over the executive branch in the normal legislative process," Attisano said.

Congressional redistricting in Pennsylvania is handled as regular legislation, requiring passage by both chambers and the governor's signature. Courts, however, drew or picked maps in 1992 and 2018. In 1992, a new map of congressional districts was picked by a Commonwealth Court judge and subsequently upheld by the state Supreme Court in a similar process that lasted six weeks.

In 2018, the state Supreme Court threw out a Republican-crafted plan that had been in place for three elections, producing a 13-5 Republican advantage. It replaced it with a map that has resulted in a split, 9-9 congressional delegation in two straight elections.

Registered Democrats in the presidential battleground state outnumber Republicans by 4 million to 3.4 million.

A three-week period during which candidates circulate petitions to get on the primary election ballot is scheduled to get begin February 15. However, it could be delayed if the court case drags on.

See complete AP Article at: [Judge begins review to pick new congressional district maps \(msn.com\)](https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/politics/ap/judge-begins-review-to-pick-new-congressional-district-maps)