

The Daily Progress

Cities call for change in Indiana redistricting

ANDERSON, Ind. (AP) — The Anderson City Council has become the sixth Indiana municipal legislative body to pass a resolution calling for a citizen panel to take over the drawing of district lines for seats in the U.S. Congress and the Indiana General Assembly.

Two public interest groups, Common Cause Indiana and the League of Women Voters, are urging local units of government to pass such resolutions, and Anderson joins Michigan City, South Bend, Lafayette, West Lafayette and Vincennes in doing so, The Herald Bulletin reported Sunday (<http://bit.ly/2bv6LsO>).

Legislative districts are redrawn every 10 years following the release of information by the U.S. Census Bureau. In Indiana, redistricting is done by the state Senate and Indiana House of Representatives and signed off on by the governor. The next redistricting in Indiana will take place in 2021.

Julia Vaughn, policy director for Indiana Common Cause, said the intent of having municipal units of government pass a resolution is to show lawmakers that there is broad public support for a change.

"Citizens seem to feel that the district lines are drawn for political purposes," she said. "The consensus is the need to have citizen input in the redistricting process."

California has adopted a system in which a citizens group is responsible for redrawing district lines, and 10 states, including Illinois and Ohio, currently are considering changing how district maps are created.

Senate Minority Leader Tim Lanane, D-Anderson, said he supports looking at alternatives to the current system.

"I'm OK with looking at a citizen panel," Lanane said. "I also want to look at the Iowa model."

Since 1980, Iowa has had its non-partisan legislative services agency redraw the district lines, he said.

"It seems to have worked well," Lanane said. "It has not been challenged in court, and the districts don't divide counties."

Lanane said selecting citizens to serve on a redistricting commission would be challenging, and added the California model is a grueling process.

Sen. Doug Eckerty, R-Yorktown, said he informed Common Cause that he has no problem studying a change in the redistricting process.

"It's not as easy as it sounds," Eckerty said. "The biggest challenge would be selecting citizens."

During an Anderson City Council meeting earlier this month, Vaughn said the process has to be opened to any registered voter in Indiana who wants to serve on a redistricting commission.

"It will be more balanced and create better districts," she said, adding that competitive districts would increase voter turnout.

In Indiana's most recent legislative election in 2014, the races for 44 seats in the Indiana General Assembly were uncontested.

"Indiana had the lowest voter turnout in the United States at 28 percent in 2014," Vaughn said.

Information from: The Herald Bulletin, <http://www.theheraldbulletin.com>

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