

Utah State Legislature Redistricting Criteria Report—7/27/2021

Cassidy Hansen

In the May 18th, 2021 meeting, the chairs of the Utah State Legislature Redistricting Committee presented draft documents of the 2021 Redistricting Principles and 2021 Redistricting Procedural Guidelines, which are included at the end of this report. The committee passed both documents “as is” after discussing the strengths and weaknesses of each.

When considering the **2021 Redistricting Principles document**, rural legislators were concerned that the $\pm 5.0\%$ threshold under Item 2 was too small, as that this deviation could create geographically large districts in rural areas. Rural legislators feel that these large districts are difficult to represent because they are not from certain communities. Rural legislators also cited that federal guidelines mandate that the difference between the largest and smallest population difference between districts must fall under a 10% deviation. These legislators argued that a percentage around 7 or 8 would be a reasonable criteria to create “fairer” districts. This amendment did not pass. Rural legislators also cited that it was sometimes difficult to travel within their districts due to geographic barriers.

We may want to consider creating a map that includes buffer/drive times for travelling across districts or between communities of interest. Moreover, it may be beneficial to allow our maps to have a greater deviation between districts if it allows communities of interest to be better represented. Allowing for a deviation percentage over 5% may help rural communities and other communities of interest maintain their voice. A committee member reported the following average standard deviations within the meeting. I am still working on finding the raw data so I can look at the spread of deviations.

District Type	Average Deviation*
State House	0.12%
State Senate	0.006%
Congressional	0.0001%
School Board	0.023%

*Standard deviations have not been cross-checked

For the **2021 Redistricting Guidelines**, legislators recommended including “considering communities of interest.” However, other legislators were concerned about the difficulty of defining the guideline and potential legal ramifications. This amendment did not pass.

Emphasizing communities of interest will continue to be important as we go through this process, especially when considering that this commission was created out of the passing of Prop 4, which was a people-driven effort.

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Something of interest to the UIRC is that the Legislative Redistricting Committee is planning on including the locations of incumbents on their public online and staff redistricting tools. Because of security issues, these locations will be within their census block.

It is helpful to emphasize that the commission's approach does not include considering incumbents thus far, as it provides credibility to the commission.