

For Immediate Release

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Amend SB15

Reform Advocates Point Out How Legislation Disenfranchises Native Americans and Independent Voters

Members of the New Mexico Redistricting Task Force and other reform advocates announced areas of concern with [Senate Bill 15 – Redistricting Committee](#), saying that the current version of the legislation disenfranchises Native American populations and New Mexico voters who “decline to state” an affiliation with a political party (also known as independent voters).

The bill takes a step in the right direction by creating a Citizen Redistricting Committee that would recommend maps of voting boundaries. However, there is little in the bill to ensure the maps meet minimum standards or that the legislature will not amend them to partisan advantage.

These concerns could be addressed through the adoption of several [priority amendments](#), which would help align the legislation with the statewide [New Mexico Redistricting Task Force](#) recommendations. Proposed revisions include:

- Section 3.B.7 (provides inclusion of sovereign nations): requiring that cultural and geographic diversity of the state and recognizing existence of 23 sovereign nations be taken into consideration when forming the redistricting task force.
- Section 5.A.2-3 (requires at least one meeting on tribal lands): Clarifies that public meetings shall be held throughout the state, at least one on tribal lands.
- Section 7.A.4 (addresses unintended consequences of dividing Native American communities): Allows for split precincts if required to comply with federal law or to protect communities of interest. This is needed because precinct boundaries in Native American communities fail to keep tribal communities together.
- Section 7.A.11-13 (aligns New Mexico with new Federal standards): Will bring the Act up to minimum federal standards and national best practices identified in the just passed [HR1-For the People Act](#).

- Section 9.C (addresses process and requires transparency): Requires the legislature to provide written evaluations of how well final maps adhere to redistricting criteria.
- Section 9.D (addresses process and requires transparency): Requires the legislature to meet the same standard as the citizen commission by holding discussions in open meetings.

Retired Chief Judge of the New Mexico Court of Appeals the Honorable Roderick Kennedy (also a co-chair of the New Mexico First Redistricting Task Force) shared: “The New Mexico First Task Force recommendations encompass recognized national best practices in drawing fair districts. Congress just adopted many of them in passing the For the People Act of 2021, particularly the prohibition of considering partisan makeup of a district’s population, and the incumbent’s address. Requiring the Legislature to explain its decisions in accepting maps to the same degree as those provided by the Commission who is proposing the maps to the legislature, and to abide by the Open Meetings Act and NM Rules Act should be a bottom-line guarantee of transparency and accountability for fair drawing of districts.”

Today, Senate Bill 15 passed the Senate without any of these amendments. The bill now moves to the House. Advocates wishing to support improvements to the bill can add their names to an [online petition](#). For more information on this issue visit <https://www.redistrictnm.org>.

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