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## **New Mexico HB 211/SB 199 Call for Seven-Member Independent Redistricting Commission**

*Commission would include two Democrats, two Republicans, and two independents*

*Bills has bipartisan support in House and Senate*

*Commission's goal to improve transparency and maximize voter participation*

SANTA FE, N.M. – House Bill 211 and Senate Bill 199 have been introduced by Representatives Rebecca Dow (R-38), Kelly Fajardo (R-7), Natalie Figeroa (D-30,) Joy Garratt (D-29), and Georgene Louis (D-26); and Senators Mark Moores (R-21) and Jerry Ortiz y Pino (D-12) to establish an independent, seven-member commission to draw redistricting maps for U.S. Congress, the state Legislature, and the state Public Education Commission. The bills were drafted by retired state Supreme Court Chief Justice Edward Chavez and retired state Court of Appeals Chief Judge Roderick Kennedy.

“This legislation will ensure that elected officials are chosen by voters in districts that more truly represent the electorate,” said Kennedy. “In the past, political considerations among legislators drawing maps have allowed New Mexico lawmakers to choose their voters in ways that have diminished full representation.”

The legislation stems from the recommendations developed by the 25-member cross-partisan Redistricting Task Force established by the non-profit New Mexico First, with funding from The Thornburg Foundation. Chavez and Kennedy co-chaired the Task Force, which drew participation from around the state from both major parties, those with no party affiliation, and groups that had been negatively impacted from prior redistricting actions.

The primary recommendation of the Task Force, which is reflected in the bills, was that the Legislature establish an independent commission to draw district maps for Congress, the Legislature and the Public Education Commission. The proposed legislation directs that the Commission will compose maps that adhere to the following:

- equitable representation by population,
- full compliance with the Voting Rights Act,
- indigenous governances,
- communities of interest,
- integrity of governmental subdivisions,
- preserving the cores of existing districts,
- contiguity and compactness,
- geographic barriers and features.

The proposed legislation directs the commission to convene by April 1, and in 2021, to deliver three to five maps for Congress, the state House of Representatives, the State Senate, and the Public Education Commission by October 15 for the Legislature to vote upon. The legislation is designed to prevent litigation; but should the redistricting effort reach the courts, there is a directive that no attorneys' fees shall be awarded.

“In 2001 and 2011, the lack of a clear process ended with much litigation and our courts drawing the maps,” said Chavez. “The lawsuits cost the state more than \$6 million in court costs and attorneys' fees.”

The legislation also seeks the maximum possible public input, calling for no less than 12 public hearings around the state to seek voter input to district boundaries. If passed, the Commission would be appointed every ten years starting in 2021 and follow the same process to redraw district boundaries for Congressional, legislative and Public Education Commission districts. New Mexico has not previously had a uniform process to draw political districts after the decennial census as is required by the U.S. and state constitutions.

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