

College of William and Mary Narrative for
W&M-1, State House of Delegates, Governor Commission

As a submission for the redistricting of the Commonwealth of Virginia's House of Delegates districts, it is the belief of the College of William and Mary's undergraduate team that our proposal best accomplishes the requirements set to us by the competition. This proposal was drawn under the guidelines for the Governor's Commission, and, therefore, this map is required to address only five of the seven criteria established by the overall competition, namely equality of population, compactness, respect to existing communities of interest, requirements set down by the Voting Rights Act, and contiguity. Parameters relating to the partisan makeup of districts, therefore, were not at all considered when these districts were drawn.

Broadly speaking, the philosophy used in drawing the plan for the House of Delegates was the same in spirit as that used in our plan for the US House of Representatives. It was our hope to draw districts that were more in keeping with the instincts of common sense. To this end, we worked to improve compactness by minimizing the number of awkward protrusions from existing districts, to use better judgment in dividing jurisdictions, and to update lines in concordance with the most recent census figures. This plan, although by no means perfect, is a substantive improvement on the existing plan; we worked to produce an effective plan in compliance with the strictures currently laid out by the federal courts.

All 100 of the districts we drew are within the +/- 5% directed margin. Although some of our districts were drawn close to the margin, we feel we were justified in making the decisions we made based on the constraints of the exercise and of Virginia's population geography. Some of our districts, for example, are very close to the upper bound of acceptable values, meaning that commensurately, there are other districts that are precariously close to the lower bound.

With regards to the issue of contiguity, we successfully insured that all 100 districts met accepted standards of contiguity.

The William & Mary House of Delegates Redistricting Plan is the result of a conscious effort to maintain communities of interest to the greatest degree possible. Given the challenges posed by the population requirements of state house districts (80,010 +/- 5% individuals per district), the judgments as to how to divide jurisdictions had to be made in the interest meeting other criteria. Districts 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, for example, had to make certain divisions based on the challenges presented by the western region's geography. We also tried to keep the lines within traditionally defined geo-cultural regions of the state, i.e. the Shenandoah Valley, Northern Virginia, the peninsular areas, etc. As part of our goal of maintaining core communities, we avoided splitting independent cities. Most cities are self-contained within their own districts; exceptions were made in the obvious cases such as Alexandria and Richmond in which the population of the jurisdiction exceeded the population of a single district. An exception also had to be made in the case of the Salem-Roanoke area because of their unique position of being surrounded by Roanoke County. Hampton Roads posed a challenge as well when meeting these criteria and therefore cities had to be divided, as will be treated in our discussion of meeting Voting Rights Act standards. Although this methodology does perhaps privilege independent cities over counties, it was chosen because cities can be defined as core communities more explicitly than the regions of counties to which they would be attached. It should also be noted that some of Virginia's independent cities, despite being urban legally, in reality contain relatively large rural areas. Some, such as Suffolk, were counties, and have since incorporated as cities. We feel that given the relatively rural nature of these communities, their subdivision between districts is more justifiable than it would be for more geographically compact cities.

The overall standard for arranging counties and cities into districts was one of avoiding spatial awkwardness. The map that has been in use since the 2001 redistricting is riddled with districts notable for awkward tendrils and protrusions that do not create a reasonable expectation of good representation. We worked to avoid such protrusions in this plan; those used were included only in the interest of meeting other standards. We can, for example, foresee objections to districts 77 and 61, which are split across multiple jurisdictions, as well as to some of our districts drawn in Hampton Roads in which we had to work be careful to keep districts within the population parameters. This resulted in some less than ideal districts, but the need to produce majority minority districts altered that universe of representation. Although we would have preferred fewer and cleaner divisions, the need to draw districts within population constraints required us to make sacrifices we would rather not have made. The need to maintain other core communities necessitated certain less than ideal compensations in other regions of the state.

In the case of the highly urbanized area of Northern Virginia, we made a deliberate effort to contain as many districts within existing county lines as we could. We were sure to keep the independent city of Fairfax, an enclave separate from the County, within the same district, and worked to minimize the crossover between Fairfax and the neighboring jurisdictions of Arlington County and Alexandria City. Some crossovers, however, proved inevitable.

Other divisions were made simply in the interest of convenience. In encountering the challenges presented by the western tri-state area, for example, precinct boundaries proved inadequate in drawing compact districts. We settled on the use of major highways as dividing lines for districts that needed populations to be evened out. Although hardly perfect, the use of highways was the best determination we could make based to encompass certain smaller communities such as neighborhoods.

This plan also had to make exceptions in the interest of meeting federal Voting Rights Act requirements. Districts in metropolitan Richmond and in Hampton Roads sacrifice a certain amount of compactness with the deliberate goal of keeping preventing the retrogression of majority black districts. This plan insures that Virginia's black population is adequately represented by these districts in the Richmond, Petersburg, and Hampton Roads regions, in addition to other districts with relatively high concentrations of black voters that do not qualify as majority-minority districts. Although the 2010 census demonstrated a marked rise in Hispanic voters in Virginia, we did not consider it feasible to draw a majority Hispanic district. Even given the sharp rise in Hispanic populations in the Prince William-Manassas area and in regions of the Shenandoah Valley, we considered the Hispanic population too dispersed to draw an effective majority Hispanic district; if we had managed to draw a majority Hispanic district, we would not be able to state with confidence that this hypothetical district would be compact enough to adequately represent the Hispanic voters we were purporting to represent. If Virginia's Hispanic population continues to grow, the inclusion of Hispanic districts as distinct communities of interest may become feasible in later plans, but as of today, drawing a district of this type would require too great a sacrifice in the compactness of other districts.

Although this map is not perfect and the population within the districts is bound to change exposed in the next ten years, it is far superior to the districts we currently have in regards to contiguity, Communities of Interest, and Majority-Minority districts, Equipopulation and Compactness. The map we present today has met all this criteria in a logical manner to enhance the quality of political representation residents of the Commonwealth of Virginia deserve. Even if the commission does not feel that our proposal is the best way forward towards real redistricting reform, we think it can be a building block from which we can work to further

that goal. We view this plan as, at the very least, a stepping stone towards a workable solution to the problem of representation.