

STATE BOARD OF ELECTIONS

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September 13, 2022

Via Electronic Mail Only

The Honorable Odette Ramos
Baltimore City Council
100 Holliday Street, Room 505
Baltimore MD 21202

Dear Councilmember Ramos,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information about the recent congressional and legislative redistricting process and share my thoughts about the upcoming City Council redistricting timeline.

Before I provide this information and share my thoughts, I would like to recognize the Baltimore City Board of Elections for administering the 2022 Primary Election. As you know, this election saw a changed election date, shorter than usual time to implement redistricting plans (as outlined below), and return to a “normal” election with a significant increase in the number of mail-in ballots. All elections require a tremendous amount of work, but this one required even more than usual. The Baltimore City Board of Elections did the necessary work and more than 94,000 voters participated in the 2022 Primary Election.

As you know, every 10 years, the federal government takes a census and after each census, State and local governments draw new boundary lines to reflect changes in population. Generally, census data is released well in advance of redistricting efforts. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, census data distribution to the states was delayed, which resulted in a delay in the approval of new congressional and legislative district lines.

Each local board of elections is responsible for implementing the redistricting plans for their local jurisdiction. As soon as the plans were approved, the local boards began preparing to assign voters to their new districts. They identified those precincts and parts of precincts that were assigned to a new district, created new precincts if a new boundary divided an existing precinct and identified potential election day polling places for the new precincts, and where available, reviewed maps provided by the local government’s GIS agency to verify the locations of the new district lines. The final step of redistricting - assigning voters to the correct districts in the statewide voter registration database¹ - began once the local boards finished the critical preparation tasks and the General Assembly enacted a revised Congressional plan on April 4, 2022, and the Court of Appeals of Maryland upheld the challenged legislative plan on April 13, 2022.

Because of other election-related deadlines, the local boards’ deadline to assign voters to their correct districts was mid-May 2022. This left the local boards with several weeks to complete a process that normally takes several months. Despite this condensed timeline, the local boards assigned more than 4 million voters to newly drawn districts in compliance with Maryland’s latest congressional and legislative maps. Although redistricting is an inherently complex and detail-oriented practice, more than 99.9% of all registered voters in Maryland were assigned to the correct legislative and congressional districts at the conclusion of the process.

Following the redistricting process, we discussed internally and with the Department of Legislative Services (DLS) ways to compare the approved maps against the district information in the statewide voter registration system. We developed a process to identify discrepancies in district information between the official voter registration database and other relevant data sources (e.g., local GIS data, Census data, TIGER)

¹ Assigning voters triggers several official actions such as generating a new voter registration card and assigning the voter to a polling place and a ballot.

and utilizing a new contract with a mapping vendor, overlaid these data sources to display visually the discrepancies. Working with a couple of local boards and using DLS' and the mapping vendor's analyses, we validated the process and asked the local boards to use State data, any data from its local GIS office, and even site visits to locations to review each identified discrepancy in their jurisdiction. If the local board determined that the address was in the correct district, the districts assigned to this address remained unchanged; if the assignment was incorrect, the local board corrected the district information in the statewide voter registration database.

Because of the tight timeline and the complexity of the necessary corrections, some local boards made corrections after voters had already received a voter registration card, sample ballot and, in some cases, a mail-in ballot. SBE supported those local boards in their efforts to provide the affected voters with the correct district information. This included an updated voter registration card, a letter explaining the error, and, if necessary, a new mail-in ballot. When redistricting issues were discovered after early voting had started, we assisted the Baltimore City Board of Elections with preparing a list of affected voters to distribute to early voting centers or election day polling places and customized election judges' instructions if the affected voters came to vote. We also supported the Baltimore City Board of Elections during the canvass to make sure that the voter's correct ballot was counted.

I believe that the two most important lessons learned from the recent redistricting process are:

1. Provide the local boards with sufficient time to perform the work associated with redistricting; and
2. Continue the statewide review and comparison of district information we started for the 2022 redistricting process.

We are committed to performing the same review and, time permitting, performing it **before** a local board begins notifying voters about district or voting location changes.

I am optimistic that, with sufficient time and resources and the newly established review process, the Baltimore City Council redistricting process will be more straightforward. To ensure that the Baltimore City Board of Elections has sufficient time to implement the final plan and we can perform a citywide review and compare district information, I ask that the new council districts be finalized no later than July 1, 2023. This will allow time for any legal challenges to be resolved in time for the Baltimore City Board of Elections to perform the necessary steps to implement the plan and our office to perform the review and comparison.

Thank you for the opportunity to share information about the recent redistricting process and proposed timeline for the upcoming Baltimore City Council process. We look forward to continuing our partnership with the Baltimore City Board of Elections as we prepare for the upcoming redistricting process and 2024 elections. If you have any questions or would like additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me or have your staff contact Melissa Dorsey at melissia.dorsey1@maryland.gov.

Sincerely,



Linda H. Lamone
State Administrator

cc: The Honorable Brandon Scott