



IN BRIEF:

## County and General Law City Redistricting Commission Requirements

Every ten years, cities and counties must redraw their council and supervisorial districts to ensure they remain substantially equal in population. This process, known as “redistricting,” is mandated by the U.S. Constitution. Without redistricting, population shifts over time could cause districts within a jurisdiction to have vastly different populations, causing the residents of more populated districts to be unfairly underrepresented.

In most jurisdictions, the city council or board of supervisors is responsible for redrawing its own districts. However, with the success of the state Citizens Redistricting Commission, which has the *independent* power to redraw state legislative and congressional boundaries, many local jurisdictions have become interested in creating local redistricting commissions of their own. Until recently, such commissions had to be advisory bodies that could offer only map recommendations to the governing board. The main exception was with charter cities, whose “home rule” autonomy under the state constitution empowered them to create fully independent commissions. San Diego County, alone, received special legislative permission to establish an independent commission.)

**In response to the local demand for fair and impartial redistricting, in 2016 the Legislature passed, by a bipartisan vote, Senate Bill 1108 (Allen) to authorize *all* counties and general law cities to establish independent commissions. Beginning January 1, 2017, any general law city or county may now, if it wants to, adopt an independent commission by enacting a resolution or ordinance that meets certain minimum criteria.**

### Why adopt an independent redistricting commission?

There are several reasons why jurisdictions opt to establish independent redistricting commissions:

★ **Increased Citizen Participation & Transparency:** Citizen commissions are a direct way to involve the community in redistricting. Commissions are required to have more public hearings and provide greater notice of proposed maps than a local legislative body. Proposed district boundaries must be considered, debated, and adopted in public, with opportunities for community input at every stage of the process.

★ **Depoliticize Redistricting:** Commissions can help depoliticize redistricting and increase public trust in the process. Under political control, redistricting can be a source of infighting on a governing board as members fight over neighborhoods or community assets. Council- or board-controlled redistricting can also be abused by the majority to accomplish political ends, for example drawing an existing member out of their district or placing two members into the same district.

★ **More Representative Districts:** Compared with legislative bodies, studies find that independent commissions generally draw districts that are more compact, less gerrymandered, and more representative of communities of interest and minority populations.

### Which jurisdictions have independent redistricting commissions?

To date, eight cities and two counties have established independent redistricting commissions:

- Berkeley
- Chula Vista
- Escondido
- Los Angeles County
- Modesto
- Oakland
- Sacramento
- San Diego
- San Diego County
- San Francisco

## What are the requirements of Senate Bill 1108?

SB 1108, which added Sections 23000 to 23003 to the state Elections Code, authorizes any county or general law city to establish an independent redistricting commission by resolution or ordinance meeting certain criteria, outlined below, to ensure the commission is transparent, engages the public, and is politically impartial.

### Commission Transparency and Public Engagement

- Hold at least four public hearings
- Publish a draft of the final map for public comment at least seven days before adoption
- Subject to the Public Records Act
- Subject to the open meeting requirements of the Brown Act

### Commission Impartiality

- Commissioners cannot all be members of the same political party
- Commission cannot discriminate against incumbents or challengers in drawing lines

### Commissioner Qualifications & Post-Service Restrictions

- Must be a resident of the jurisdiction
- Cannot, in 8 years prior to appointment, have been a local candidate, campaign staff, major campaign donor (\$500+), lobbyist, or political party officer
- Cannot, while serving, participate in local campaigns
- Cannot, for 4 years after serving, be appointed to local office, be staff to a local elected official, receive a non-competitively bid contract, or register as a local lobbyist
- Cannot, for 10 years after serving, run for local elected office

## Interested in setting up a commission?

With the 2020 Census and subsequent redistricting approaching, the University of the Pacific's McGeorge School of Law and California Common Cause have set up a joint program to assist local governments interested in starting their own redistricting commissions. Please visit [www.localredistricting.org](http://www.localredistricting.org) for more information regarding local redistricting law; sample redistricting ordinances from across the state; best practices recommendations; and customizable ordinance language.

If you are interested in having a presentation on local redistricting, would like help with drafting a redistricting ordinance, or would like other technical assistance, please contact:

## Nicolas Heidorn

### Local Redistricting Project Director

 (916) 443-1792

 [nheidorn@pacific.edu](mailto:nheidorn@pacific.edu)

 [www.localredistricting.org](http://www.localredistricting.org)

---

*A project of California Common Cause and the University of the Pacific, McGeorge School of Law  
with support by a grant from the James Irvine Foundation.*

