

## NATIONAL

# State House map proposed by Democrats reunites counties, cities divided in current districts

NASHVILLE — Dozens of communities across the state and 10 counties would be reunited into single districts in the Tennessee House of Representatives under a statewide redistricting proposal released Thursday by Democrats.

“We started out with a simple idea: keep cities and communities together, wherever we can, in a fair map that makes sense to voters,” said Rep. Vincent Dixie, chairman of the House minority caucus. “This map reduces the number of split counties, empowers more cities and better reflects the whole state whether you’re black, white or brown or whether you live in a rural area or downtown.”

First and foremost, Dixie says, the plan complies with the constitutional requirement of “one person, one vote,” meaning each house district is drawn to have a “substantially equal population” close to 69,806. Under the Democrats’ plan, the average House district is within 2.1% of the target population.

Overall, the plan keeps 72 counties whole with only 23 county splits — 18 of which are carried over from the current map. The current state House map has 28 county splits.

The constitutional requirement for equal population means several counties must be split.

Under the Democratic plan, 10 counties are made whole in House Districts: Greene, Union, Roane, Marion, Franklin, Lincoln, DeKalb, Lawrence, Hardeman and Obion counties.

Additionally, the Democratic plan keeps together nearly three dozen more cities and small towns that are divided on the current map, such as Jefferson City, Sevierville, Plainview, Luttrell, Maryville, South Cleveland, McMinnville, Smithville, Gallatin, Hendersonville, Bethpage, LaVergne, Christiana, Brentwood, Thompson Station, Spring Hill, Columbia, Union City, Millington, Jamestown, Farragut, Louisville and more.

Pairing Shelby County with Fayette County

Of the five new county splits on the Democratic map, three are unavoidable due to population shifts.

The contemplated split in Shelby County, Tennessee’s most populous county, is the result of the highly unusual situation where mapmakers could draw Shelby with either 13 dis-

tricts or 14 districts and still comply with the law.

Under this map, Shelby County is paired with Fayette County to create a shared 14th district.

In this scenario, Shelby County and its nearly one million residents, are neither over-represented nor under-represented, Democrats say. Instead, it ensures that Shelby County residents receive equal representation in the state House. The House GOP’s 13-seat plan would systematically underrepresent Shelby County: approximately a third of a district — would have their votes diluted and divided up across 13 districts.

While it remains best practice to keep Tennessee’s large urban counties whole in the districting process, a 1983 Tennessee Supreme Court opinion, *Lockert v. Crowell*, contemplates this situation and established standards for splitting large counties. Under the ruling, county splits are justified and constitutional under two conditions:

When it reduces the population variance of an adjoining district; or

When it prevents the dilution of minority voting power.

Joining Shelby and Fayette counties together here achieves both objectives.

Under the Democrats’ proposal, Shelby County would maintain 10 districts where minority voters have influence over electoral outcomes: nine majority minority districts and one opportunity district, also called a crossover district, for minority voters in Cordova, a suburban community where demographics have shifted over the last decade.

Moreover, this proposal makes it possible to draw more constitutionally sound districts throughout West Tennessee.

The House GOP’s 13-seat plan for Shelby County would eliminate one effective majority minority district in the core of Memphis and convert the suburban opportunity district into a majority minority district by racially gerrymandering lines nearer to downtown.

“The Republican plan would reduce the number of Shelby County districts where minority voters can influence the outcome of an election from 10 to 9,” said House Democratic Leader Karen Camper. “The Tennessee

Supreme Court’s ruling in *Lockert* predicted this very circumstance and said mapmakers have a duty to protect the voting rights and strength of minority communities in large counties. We believe and, in fact, the constitution demands that we create a plan that won’t dilute the representation of minority voters in Shelby County.”

## Biggest changes

Middle Tennessee counties outside of Nashville would gain three full seats in the Tennessee House of Representatives: one in Montgomery County, one in Rutherford County and another shared between Sumner and Wilson counties. The shift in districts — two from West Tennessee and one from East Tennessee—aligns with population growth patterns over the last decade.

Montgomery County, where the population increased by nearly 30 percent over a decade, now requires at least three full seats in the state House. In this map, two existing seats, House Districts 67 and 68, retain a familiar outline while a third full seat, House District 75, is added to western parts of Clarksville and the Woodlawn community. This map also draws a portion of House District 69 into south Montgomery County, where it then connects to Dickson County.

Rutherford County, at a population of 341,486, is allotted five districts in the state House — up from four on the previous map. Relocated House District 17 would include the suburban Blackman community and rural Alma-ville then moving north to Rocky Fork and Smyrna. To accommodate the new seat, this map draws District 34 across the core of the city of Murfreesboro. House District 49 tightens around the cities of LaVergne and Smyrna while Districts 37 and 48 fill out the county to the north and south divided by Halls Hill Pike respectively.

Sumner and Wilson counties gained enough population collectively to share a new seat in the state House. This plan creates a seat by pairing two communities along the Cumberland River from each county: Gallatin in Sumner and the LaGuardo community in Wilson.

Williamson and Maury counties are in a similar position: These coun-

ties gained enough population collectively to share a full, new seat in the state House. Under this plan, a district is created for the city of Spring Hill, which straddles the Maury-Williamson line, and its surrounding areas in both counties.

## Minority representation

Democrats say there are 22 districts included in the proposal where voters who belong to a minority group could influence the outcome of an election.

This map maintains 13 districts where a minority group represents a majority of the voting age population — 50 percent or more.

In addition to the minority majority House districts, this statewide proposal includes 9 “opportunity districts” — a crossover district where minority groups makeup more than 35 percent of the voting age population, but less than a majority and have an opportunity to influence the outcome of an election.

## About redistricting

House Democrats will present this concept to the House of Representatives’ ad hoc committee on redistricting on Friday, Dec. 17. The committee, led by the Republican supermajority, is also expected to release a House map favored by the GOP caucus.

The community districting process — known as redistricting — takes place every 10 years after federal census officials release data showing the population of every city, town and county in the nation.

Before the 2022 election cycle, the Tennessee General Assembly must, by law, draw political boundaries to equalize the number of people in each district.

A good district map reflects a whole community, such as a city or county, or a community of shared interests, including neighborhoods or groups of people who have common policy concerns that would benefit from being drawn into a single district.

## Bethel Bible Village received Tennessee Governor’s Award for Excellence

Hixson, Tenn. — Bethel Bible Village recently received the Tennessee Governor’s Award for Excellence from the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives.

Bethel Bible Village was selected by a committee of state and local leaders who recognized 18 non-profit agencies and houses of worship from across the state of Tennessee. Bethel was specifically recognized by Governor Bill Lee for “honoring your Christ-centered approach to serving children who are overcoming trauma and crisis in TN and beyond. Your efforts are a part of turning broken stories into something beautiful.”

“Bethel has, for many years, found ways to serve children and their families that have for one reason or another, not found success down traditional paths. Through their residential program and their school, they are meeting needs of those kids and preparing them for success. I am thankful for the Board, volunteers and staff of Bethel and we are pleased to be able to recognize them for their great work,” added Lee.

“We are honored to be recognized by Governor Lee for our part in serving children in the State of Tennessee who need specialized services to overcome trauma in their lives. We focus on the spiritual, physical, intellectual, relational and emotional needs of every child, helping them to recognize what the love of Jesus Christ means in their lives, and what a difference that love makes for their future,” Bethel



Photo caption, from left: Michael Jinks, selection committee member; Tabi Upton, selection committee member; Harriet Brunner, Bethel CFO; Nancy Hoover, Bethel; Gary Yerbey, Bethel Board Member; Christi Wann, Bethel Board Vice Chair; Ron Bailey, Bethel Board Chair; TN Rep. Robin Smith, selection committee member; Sally Worland; Dave Worland, Executive Director, Governor’s Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives.

President Rosalind Connor said.

Bethel has served the Chattanooga region for 67 years. The organization began by providing residential housing for the children of prisoners but has evolved to meet the changing needs of families and children in the Chattanooga region and beyond.

In addition to serving children and meeting their needs through education, counseling and therapy, Bethel’s residential program has expanded to include an independent living home for young people 18-21, who have graduated from high school. These residents are pursuing a post-secondary degree and are

working but have no other safe place to live.

Bethel’s 50-acre campus features Bethel Christian Academy, an accredited middle and high school for residents and other day students in need of our special educational services. The organization does not receive government funds, but relies on donations from individuals, businesses, and foundations, who are recognized as Bethel’s “Heroes for Hope,” and through various fundraising events.

To learn how Bethel Bible Village provides hope and healing for children and families in crisis, visit [www.bethelbiblevillage.org](http://www.bethelbiblevillage.org).

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