

Legislation Text

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January 28, 2002

TO THE PRESIDENT AND MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADLEPHIA:

I am returning herewith as disapproved Bill Number 010646, entitled "An Ordinance amending Chapter 20-500 of The Philadelphia Code, entitled 'Councilmanic Districts,' by revising the boundaries of the Councilmanic Districts, under certain terms and conditions." Council passed this bill at its session on December 20, 2001.

Bill 010646 would redraw the boundaries of the City's ten Councilmanic districts pursuant to Council's obligation under section 2-102 of the Home Rule Charter to do so after the federal government's completion of the census. As you know, redistricting is intended to adjust for geographic shifts in the City's population, in order to maintain roughly equal numbers of people in each of the ten districts. Equalization of population - in order to maintain the Constitutional principle of "one person-one vote" -- is a requirement of federal and state law as well as a requirement of our Charter. The equalization of population, however, only establishes the framework within which redistricting occurs. Districts must also be contiguous, compact, protect fairly the interest or racial groups. Redistricting principles also require that attention be paid to political fairness.

Given the myriad constraints redistricting is admittedly a difficult political and legal matter. For a variety of reasons, however, I cannot approve the bill that Council has passed.

First, the bill still does not optimally equalize the populations of the districts or promote the principle of "one person-one vote" as closely as it should and can. The deviation in Bill 010646, while not as large as the deviation in Bill 010523, still remains more than two and a half times as large as the largest spread in the last thirty years, the 2.8% spread of 1971. This continues to be a troubling issue.

Second, the redistricting plan still does not make a sufficient effort to distribute fairly the political burden of redistricting. For example, although the 5th District suffered a population loss of more than 16,000 people, the most recent plan approved by Council begins by shifting approximately 12,000 current residents out of the 5th District. The newly constituted 5th District is comprised of more than 30,000 new residents, spread across 17 wards stretching from Center City to the Lower Northeast. While population shifts demand shifts in district boundaries, one of the essential parameters of any redistricting process must be fairness - fairness to each of the individuals elected and ultimately to the residents of the City. Quite simply, Bill 010646 places the heavy political burden of redistricting upon only a few the members of Council, allowing the rest to benefit. The impact, as a result is punitive rather than fair.

For all of the foregoing reasons, I cannot approve Bill No. 010646, and I return it to you disapproved. I take this action with the understanding that discussions currently underway have resulted in a redistricting proposal that addresses the problems identified above. I anticipate its prompt consideration thereby allowing this challenging exercise to come to an end.

Respectfully submitted,

John F. Street
Mayor