

LACRA'S PUBLIC INPUT & TRANSPARENCY

Summary

The Legislative and Congressional Redistricting Act, or “LACRA” (HB22/SB222), is a bill that would increase transparency and public input in the redistricting process, along with enshrining clear criteria to prevent a number of redistricting offenses. It would not change who draws new legislative and congressional districts (the Legislative Reapportionment Commission (LRC) and the Legislature, respectively), but it would ensure greater public access and accountability throughout the process.

How does LACRA increase public input in the redistricting process?

LACRA would mandate formal avenues for input in the form of public hearings, map submissions, and public comments. For legislative redistricting, the LRC would have to hold four hearings in different regions of the Commonwealth prior to completing a preliminary plan; another two hearings would be held if exceptions to the plan were filed. For congressional redistricting, four hearings in different regions would be required both before and after the approval of a preliminary plan. A similar number of hearings is required in [Illinois](#), [Oregon](#), and [Utah](#). Throughout both processes, citizens would be allowed to submit their own draft plans for any and all districts and/or communities of interest.

Finally, the bipartisan [Legislative Data Processing Committee](#) (LDPC) would create an electronic public comment portal to facilitate the submission of written testimony. These new public input requirements are [pivotal to the success](#) of LACRA's new community-of-interest criterion.

What additional transparency requirements does LACRA put in place?

LACRA also includes procedural provisions to guarantee greater transparency. The LRC and congressional redistricting committees would be subject to Pennsylvania's Open Meetings Law, a common transparency mechanism in [a number of states](#). All meetings would be livestreamed, held at convenient times, and available in multiple languages. In addition, adequate notice would be required before any meeting, with a video archive made available after. LACRA would also mandate the timely publication of all underlying data, preliminary and final plans, testimony transcripts, and analytical reports. This wealth of information would (1) be accessible on a public, free, and user-friendly website established by the LDPC; (2) be provided with adequate time to review; and (3) remain on the website for at least 10 years following its publication.

Why is it useful to have so many types of data released free of charge for public use?

The public release of data is necessary for meaningful citizen involvement in the redistricting process. For example, LACRA's required publication of all underlying data used to create plans, in formats easily usable for analysis, would allow citizens to scrutinize released plans and to create and present their own to the LRC and congressional redistricting committees. Live and archived meetings would allow the public to directly participate in, and keep an eye on, the process to ensure that it is fair. Lastly, the provisions for real-time, electronic input would allow citizens from all over the Commonwealth to participate. Such capability has become especially important as social distancing becomes commonplace in response to the current public health crisis.

What else does LACRA do to guard the integrity of the redistricting process?

In addition to increased public input and transparency requirements, LACRA would impose additional eligibility requirements for the LRC chairperson to guard against undue political influence. Currently, the [state constitution](#) only stipulates that the chairperson cannot presently hold political office. Under the new qualifications outlined in LACRA, the chairperson cannot have registered as a lobbyist, been nominated for office, or served as a staff member of a political group – nor have a spouse who has done any of the above – in the preceding five years. These requirements will protect the independence of the LRC and the redistricting process and are common among other commissions.

Furthermore, the Chair would be required to meet ethical standards already spelled out in Pennsylvania law. The Chair would also have to fill out a financial disclosure form before taking office and one year after leaving.



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