

To: Vermont House Government Operations Committee  
From: Town of Grand Isle, Board of Civil Authority  
Date: February 2, 2022  
Re: 2022 Redistricting Proposals

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The Grand Isle Board of Civil Authority (BCA) met on January 25th to review the various redistricting proposals. At that meeting, the BCA voted to request a two-member district in place of any of the proposed single-member districts. Our preference is for a two-member district including all five towns in Grand Isle County, with the addition of whatever Chittenden or Franklin County territory is needed to avoid excessive population deviation.

Should Grand Isle end up in a single-member district, the Grand Isle BCA voted to prefer the most recent proposal (H.589), comprising South Hero, Grand Isle, and the southern portion of North Hero over either of the earlier proposals which divide the Town of Grand Isle between two districts.

As we stated in our initial response to the Legislative Apportionment Board (LAB), the Grand Isle BCA strongly objects to the LAB majority proposal(s) and any other plan which divides the Town of Grand Isle between two districts. Administering multiple legislative elections within the town will complicate election administration, raise costs, and contribute to voter confusion. None of the plans which divide Grand Isle Town appear to use any natural divisions.

Reapportionment should not be viewed as a purely mathematical exercise. Besides population criteria, the Vermont Constitution and Vermont Statutes supply at least four other important criteria which seem to have been given little weight by the Legislative Apportionment Board in their proposals. The final majority LAB proposal for Grand Isle split the town between two districts, one of which was cobbled together from South Hero with bits of Grand Isle, Milton, and Georgia added on – spanning three counties!

“In establishing representative districts, which shall afford equality of representation, the General Assembly shall seek to maintain geographical compactness and contiguity...” – Chapter II, §13, Vt. Constitution

“In establishing representative districts, which shall afford equality of representation, the General Assembly shall seek to maintain geographical compactness and contiguity and to **adhere to boundaries of counties and other existing political subdivisions.**” – Chapter II, §13, Vt. Constitution (emphasis added.)

“The representative and senatorial districts shall be formed consistent with the following policies insofar as practicable... (2) recognition and maintenance of patterns of geography, social interaction, trade, political ties and common interests;” – 17 V.S.A. § 1903

“In making a proposal [for dividing initial districts] under this section, the boards of civil authority shall consider (1) preservation of existing political subdivision lines; (2) recognition and maintenance of patterns of geography, social interaction, trade, political ties and common interests; (3) use of compact and contiguous territory; (4) incumbencies.” – 17 V.S.A. § 1906b

Grand Isle County has unique geographic features that generate common interests on many issues and create many similar challenges for each community. The most obvious feature is that we are surrounded by Lake Champlain and Quebec on all sides and have very limited physical links to the rest of Vermont. Despite this, the vast majority of employed residents in all towns commute outside the county to their jobs. All towns have extensive lakeshore and are impacted by similar water quality issues. Grand Isle County comprises a single school supervisory district. Grand Isle, North Hero, and Isle La Motte comprise a single unified union school district. All plans presented so far divide both educational districts between two legislative districts.

Given these common interests and the existing county boundary, we believe that Grand Isle County should not be split between multiple districts, and if possible no town in Grand Isle County should be divided. Although Grand Isle County as a whole does not have quite enough population to support a two-member district wholly within the county, at 7,293 it is close. The H.589 map includes other two-member districts with populations as low as 7,903.

A low deviation district could be obtained by incorporating relatively small portions of Milton or Swanton. Both of these adjacent towns are large enough that they will need to be subdivided in any plan. The current two-member district (Grand Isle County plus West Milton) is a low deviation two-member district (1.2%) and would certainly be viable as-is. Alternatively, the proposed two-member GI-FRA district (Alburgh, Isle La Motte, portions of North Hero, and the bulk of Swanton) could be divided to create a single-member district incorporating the bulk of Swanton and combining the western lakeshore areas with Grand Isle County to create a low-deviation two-member district.

Should the final redistricting plan still include a single-member district covering the Town of Grand Isle, the BCA prefers the H.589 plan (Grand Isle, South Hero, part of North Hero) to the LAB plan (part of Grand Isle, South Hero, part of Milton, part of Georgia; part of Grand Isle, North Hero, Isle La Motte, and Alburgh.) We would also note that the LAB plan has relatively high deviations for both these districts (+6.72% and +6.83%) creating two of the most over-sized – and thus underrepresented – districts in the state. Given population increases in our towns, this deviation would become worse over the next decade.

To be clear the Grand Isle BCA's original request that our current two-member district remain the same still stands. The current district has a very low deviation in its current configuration and well suits the geographical and social make-up of the county.