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## Amendment Z Legislative Redistricting

*(This measure requires at least 55 percent of the vote to pass.)*

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### ANALYSIS

#### Amendment Z proposes amending the Colorado Constitution to:

- ◆ replace the Colorado Reapportionment Commission with the Independent Legislative Redistricting Commission, consisting of an equal number of members from each of the state's two largest political parties and unaffiliated voters, to amend and approve state legislative district maps drawn by nonpartisan legislative staff;
- ◆ establish a process for selecting commissioners, new requirements for transparency and ethics, and a procedure for judicial review of commission maps; and
- ◆ expand and prioritize the criteria the commission must use for adopting state legislative district maps

#### Summary and Analysis

Amendment Z establishes a new process for state legislative redistricting. Amendment Y, which is also on the 2018 ballot, proposes a similar but separate process for congressional redistricting.

**Redistricting.** The state legislature has 35 state senators and 65 state representatives. The U.S. Census is conducted every ten years, and afterward state legislative districts are redrawn to have nearly equal populations.

**Legislative redistricting process in Colorado.** Since voters approved its creation in 1974, the Colorado Reapportionment Commission (reapportionment commission) has convened after each U.S. Census to draw new state legislative district maps. The reapportionment commission consists of 11 members appointed by legislative leaders, the Governor, and the Chief Justice of the Colorado Supreme Court. Up to 6 of the 11 members may be affiliated with the same political party. The state legislature provides the reapportionment commission with nonpartisan staff support. The reapportionment commission is required to draft preliminary maps for state senate and house districts and hold public hearings on the maps throughout the state. Its final maps must have the support of a simple majority of commissioners, and they are submitted to the Colorado Supreme Court for approval.

Amendment Z replaces the reapportionment commission with the Independent Legislative Redistricting Commission (commission), which is charged with drawing the state's legislative districts. The new commission must have 12 members, 4 from the state's largest political party, which is currently the Democratic Party, 4 from the state's second largest political party, which is currently the Republican Party, and 4 who are not affiliated with any political party. These members are appointed from a pool of applicants as described below.

**Application and appointment process.** Amendment Z sets minimum qualifications for commissioners. An applicant must be registered to vote and have voted in the previous two general elections in Colorado, and have been either affiliated with the same party or unaffiliated with any party for the last five consecutive years. An applicant may not be appointed to the commission if he or she has been a candidate for the state legislature within the last five years, or within the last three years been: a professional registered lobbyist; an elected public official; an elected political party official above the precinct level; or paid by a member of or candidate for the state legislature. Commissioners may not also serve on the Independent Congressional Redistricting Commission proposed in Amendment Y.

The measure requires nonpartisan legislative staff to prepare an application form for commissioners after receiving public input on the application at one or more public hearings. All applications submitted

must be posted on a public website. Nonpartisan legislative staff must review commission applications to ensure applicants meet the minimum qualifications.

The Chief Justice of the Colorado Supreme Court designates a panel of three of the most recently retired judges from the Colorado Supreme Court or Colorado Court of Appeals to facilitate the selection of commissioners. No more than one of the three judges may be registered with any one political party, and the panel's decisions must be unanimous. Selected judges may not also serve on the panel that facilitates the selection of the proposed Independent Congressional Redistricting Commission. From all of the qualified applicants, the panel of retired judges randomly selects a pool of 1,050 applicants. The panel then narrows the applicant pool to 150 applicants using criteria related to applicants' experience, analytical skills, and ability to be impartial and promote consensus.

From the 150-person applicant pool, the panel randomly chooses 2 commissioners affiliated with the state's largest political party, 2 commissioners affiliated with the state's second largest political party, and 2 commissioners who are not affiliated with a political party. For the remaining 6 commissioners, the panel selects 2 additional unaffiliated commissioners from the pool of 1,050 applicants, and 4 commissioners from applicant pools determined by legislative leaders. The final 12-member commission will have 4 Democrats, 4 Republicans, and 4 unaffiliated members, unless another political party becomes the largest or second largest political party in the state. The final composition of the commission should reflect Colorado's racial, ethnic, gender, and geographic diversity, and must include members from each congressional district, including at least one member from the Western Slope.

**Commission operations.** Under the measure, the commission is responsible for adopting rules to govern its administration and operation, and the commissioners are subject to open meeting laws. Staff for the commission must be assigned from nonpartisan legislative staff agencies. Commissioners are prohibited from communicating with nonpartisan legislative staff about any maps outside of a public meeting or hearing, and staff are prohibited from communicating with outside parties concerning the development of redistricting maps. Any commissioner who participates in prohibited communication must be removed from the commission. Any person who receives compensation for advocating to the commission, one or more commissioners, or staff is considered a lobbyist and must disclose his or her compensation and its source to the Secretary of State for publication.

**Criteria for drawing legislative district maps.** The U.S. and Colorado constitutions require state legislative districts to be as nearly equal in population as possible. Under the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965, the state cannot change voting standards, practices, or procedures in a way that denies or limits the right to vote based on race or color or membership in a language minority group. In particular, the act requires that a minority group's voting strength not be diluted under a redistricting map.

Additionally, current state law requires, when drawing state legislative maps, that:

- districts be contiguous and as compact in area as possible;
- the division of counties and cities among multiple districts be minimized; and
- communities of interest be preserved where possible.

Amendment Z maintains these criteria, but prioritizes the preservation of communities of interest and certain political subdivisions that, in their entirety, fit within a district. It limits the splitting of cities, towns, and counties to those circumstances when a community of interest, which is a group sharing specific state legislative interests, has a reason for being kept together in a district that is more essential to the fair and effective representation of voters. The measure also incorporates principles of the Voting Rights Act into state law and prohibits the approval of a map that violates these principles.

After these criteria are considered, Amendment Z requires the commission to maximize the number of politically competitive districts, which are defined as having the reasonable potential for the party affiliation of the district's representative to change at least once over the decade, to the extent possible. Maps cannot be drawn for the purpose of protecting incumbents, candidates, or political parties.

**Map consideration and public involvement.** The measure directs nonpartisan commission staff to create preliminary redistricting maps for the state senate and House of Representatives, and requires them to consider public comments while developing the maps. Members of the public may also present proposed redistricting maps and written comments for the commission's consideration. The commission must hold at least three public hearings in each congressional district to receive public input before approving redistricting maps. At least ten commissioners must attend each hearing, either in person or electronically. These hearings must be broadcast online, and the commission must maintain a website through which Colorado residents may submit maps or written comments. All written comments pertaining to redistricting must be published on the website. After the commission holds its hearings on the preliminary maps, staff must prepare additional maps. The commission can adopt standards and guidelines for staff to follow when developing staff maps. Any commissioner can request at a public hearing that staff prepare additional maps or amendments to maps. The commission can adopt final maps at any time after the presentation of the first staff maps.

**Final maps.** Under the measure, the commission must adopt final maps for state senate and house districts and submit them to the Colorado Supreme Court for review. At least 8 of the 12 commissioners, including at least 2 unaffiliated commissioners, must approve the final maps, and the maps must be made public before the commission votes on them. If the commission fails to submit the final maps, staff maps must be submitted, without amendments, to the Colorado Supreme Court for judicial review.

The Colorado Supreme Court must approve the final maps unless the court finds that the commission abused its discretion in applying or failing to apply required criteria, in which case the court must return them to the commission. If returned, the commission has 12 days to hold a hearing and submit the revised maps to the Colorado Supreme Court. If the commission fails to submit revised maps, nonpartisan staff have an additional three days to submit revised maps. The Colorado Supreme Court must approve the legislative redistricting maps by December 29 of the redistricting year.

*For information on those issue committees that support or oppose the measures on the ballot at the November 6, 2018, election, go to the Colorado Secretary of State's elections center web site hyperlink for ballot and initiative information: <http://www.sos.state.co.us/pubs/elections/Initiatives/InitiativesHome.html>*

## Arguments For

- 1) Amendment Z limits the role of partisan politics in the legislative redistricting process. Through the commissioner selection process, checks and balances are in place to ensure no one political party controls the commission. Applicants must be qualified to serve on the commission and, unlike the current reapportionment commission, lobbyists and politicians are prohibited from serving. The selection process limits the appointment power of party leaders by relying on retired judges and random selection. Republicans, Democrats, and unaffiliated voters must be appointed to the commission in equal numbers. Additionally, nonpartisan legislative staff draw the district maps, and each map's approval requires a supermajority vote of the commission, including at least two unaffiliated commissioners. These provisions encourage political compromise by keeping political parties and politicians with a vested interest in the outcome from controlling the redistricting process.
- 2) The measure makes the redistricting process more transparent and provides greater opportunity for public participation. Legislative redistricting is conducted by a more independent commission than currently exists, with safeguards against undue influence in the preparation and adoption of maps. The commission is subject to state open records and open meetings laws, and anyone paid to lobby the commission has 72 hours to disclose their lobbying activities. By requiring that map-related communications occur in public, Coloradans will be able to see exactly how the districts are drawn.
- 3) The measure brings structure to the redistricting process by using clear, ordered, and fair criteria in the drawing of districts. By prioritizing factors such as communities of interest, city and county

lines, and political competitiveness, it provides specific direction to the commission about how it should evaluate proposed maps. It also prevents the adoption of maps that protect incumbents, candidates, or political parties, or maps that dilute the electoral influence of racial or ethnic minorities.

## Arguments Against

- 1) Amendment Z reduces accountability in the redistricting process. The selection process the measure proposes will result in a group of commissioners who are not only not elected, but are not even accountable to elected officials. This process relies on unelected retired judges to screen applicants and select half of the commissioners. Further, the commission is staffed by government employees who are not accountable to the voters, and they may end up drawing the final maps if the commission cannot agree. Legislative staff may have a vested interest in the outcome of legislative elections that could bias their work drawing district maps.
- 2) The commissioner selection process outlined in the measure is complex, and half of the members are determined by random chance. This complicated and random selection process may prevent individuals with important experience and knowledge from becoming commissioners. While the goal of the random selection may be to remove politics from redistricting, unaffiliated commissioners with partisan views could still be selected, and the selection process may not result in a commission that can be impartial and promote consensus.
- 3) The measure outlines criteria that may be difficult to apply in an objective manner. For example, the broad definition of communities of interest is vague and open to interpretation. The measure also leaves the commission to determine what a competitive district is without specifying what factors to consider. Additionally, the four unaffiliated commissioners will have political leanings that may be difficult to discern, but that could sway how they apply the criteria and influence the final maps, since many critical votes require their support. The resulting maps may serve to protect certain segments of the population at the expense of others and could result in districts that make no sense to voters.

## Estimate of Fiscal Impact

**State revenue.** Beginning in FY 2020-21, Amendment Z may minimally increase Secretary of State cash fund revenue from fines collected from lobbyists who fail to disclose the required information.

**State expenditures.** Overall, Amendment Z increases state expenditures to fund the Independent Legislative Redistricting Commission by \$252,065 in FY 2020-21, and decreases state expenditures by \$65,977 in FY 2021-22, as compared with the expenses for the current Reapportionment Commission.