

Galvin Views Redistricting Bill As Way to Protect Incumbents

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State House News Service

An intra-party fight between legislative Democrats and the state's chief elections officer continued to deepen Friday, with Secretary of State William Galvin accusing lawmakers of trying to change how the state draws political maps to shield themselves from challenges and consolidate power.

A day after House Democrats pushed through a bill empowering the Legislature to carve up state and federal electoral districts before municipalities draw precincts, Galvin said he believes lawmakers are "making districts that are as favorable to themselves as they can."

"Most of the people in the Legislature are not terribly concerned about general election contests, especially if they come from urban districts. Most any objective analysis would confirm that's true," Galvin told the News Service. "So then it becomes the primary."

The legislation (H 3863) flips the standard order of operations for the decennial redistricting and reprecincting process, empowering the Legislature to create House, Senate, Governor's Council and congressional districts first using Census tract and block data and requiring municipalities to craft their local precincts afterward. Galvin said he believes the push aims specifically at House districts rather than larger Senate or congressional districts. Asked how House leadership and representatives would benefit from the process change as he alleges, Galvin took aim specifically at Rep. Michael Moran, the House's Redistricting Committee co-chair.

“Have you ever looked at Moran’s district?” Galvin said, referencing the shape of Moran’s 18th Suffolk District, which stretches like a tilted letter C following Boston neighborhoods along the Charles River and includes a single Brookline precinct. “It’s been that way for 40 years. It was created to get rid of me,” said Galvin, a Brighton Democrat who spent a decade and a half in the House before running unsuccessfully for treasurer and then winning secretary of state in 1994. “Obviously, it didn’t work.”

Moran could not be reached for immediate comment Friday afternoon, but he told the Boston Globe that Galvin’s criticisms of lawmakers are “not based in any fact whatsoever.” Earlier in the week, he told the News Service his motivation was to “correct for a lot of things that have been baked into the system for decades.”

“There are people who are marginalized because of precincts built many years ago and where we can correct that I have every intention of doing that this time around,” Moran said. The bill has drawn support from several voting rights groups that say the majority of states approach redistricting in this fashion, enabling lawmakers to draw more cohesive districts using Census tracts and more easily keep communities of interest together. The legislation is opposed by the Massachusetts Municipal Association, and is now pending in the Senate. It’s unclear when that branch plans to take it up.