

Judicial Redistricting | Core Messages

District and Superior Court judges in North Carolina are elected by voters in districts. The district lines are old and many believe they should be modified, but multiple factors should go into making them fair -- such as population and demographics, typical case load, demand for special programs, and travel distances for judges “riding the circuit.” Unfortunately, a plan to redraw the lines (HB-717) is being pushed by a small number of House Republicans, led by Rep. Justin Burr, who is a bail bondsman.

Lawmakers Need to Slow Down

Judicial redistricting is serious business, requiring a deliberative process with research about the districts and substantial input from key stakeholders and the public.

- In legislative meetings, many judges, court administrators, and lawyers (Republicans and Democrats) have asked legislators to “slow down” their plans to redraw NC’s judicial districts.
- A better approach exists: The NC Courts Commission recommended a judicial redistricting study (HB-124) that has bipartisan support, but it has not advanced in the General Assembly.

Another Sham Redistricting Process

Rep. Justin Burr, sponsor of House Bill 717, has aggressively pushed his plan, despite many calls to slow down, even from the conservative John Locke Foundation. He privately makes changes to his district plans and suddenly releases them just before a legislative meeting or a public hearing. This process is a charade, similar to the one used to adopt new General Assembly maps.

New Judicial Maps Are Racist

The proposed plan:

- reduces the number of judges serving predominantly Black counties, while increasing the number of judicial seats in predominantly white counties, regardless of their size.
- creates zigzagging judicial districts in urban counties that are similar to legislative districts struck down as racial gerrymanders (e.g., in Guilford County).
- increases the backlogs of court cases for African Americans and harms alternative sentencing programs -- delaying justice and increasing business for bail bondsmen like Rep. Justin Burr.

Rigging the System for Partisan Control

Like legislative gerrymandering and partisan judicial elections, the maps rig the system to help one party and its ideology. The maps:

- redraw districts to make it easier for Republican judges to win elections.
- overburden the court system for traditional Democratic voters by reducing the number of judges elected from urban centers and rural areas with significant African American residents.
- erode the independence of our courts and compromise voters’ ability to elect judges that will fairly and impartially preside over cases in their communities