

GOP criticizes Democratic plan for July special session

By Mennatalla Ibrahim

Maryland Republicans say they were largely left in the dark as Maryland's top Democrats prepared plans for a mid-July special session that could create a pathway for redrawing the state's congressional map, potentially reshaping the balance of political power in Maryland's congressional delegation.

Representatives from Senate President Bill Ferguson's office confirmed to The Baltimore Sun on Monday that legislative leaders plan to call for a special session immediately after Maryland's June 23 primary election.

The formal announcement will likely come jointly from Ferguson, Gov. Wes Moore, and House Speaker Joseline Peña-Melnyk, whose offices have been coordinating the effort, Ferguson's representatives said.

During the session, lawmakers would consider a November referendum on a constitutional amendment that would remove a barrier preventing congressional districts from crossing the Chesapeake Bay.

If approved by lawmakers and ratified by voters, the change could allow Democrats to pursue new congressional maps ahead of future elections. According to Ferguson's office, lawmakers must act by July 31 to place the measure on the November ballot. The amendment language is still being drafted and is expected to differ from proposals debated earlier this year.

Maryland's highest court rejected a similar approach during the 2022 redistricting cycle, and no revised map has been proposed. However, Republicans have noted that removing the Chesapeake Bay restriction could give lawmakers greater flexibility to redraw Maryland's lone Republican-held congressional district, represented by U.S. Rep. Andy Harris.

Moore and other Maryland Democrats have argued the state should explore redistricting options as part of a broader national fight over congressional control. Supporters have framed the effort as a response to redistricting efforts in Republican states like Texas and Florida, maintaining that Democrats should not unilaterally disarm while other states redraw maps for partisan advantage. But critics maintain that the practical effect would be to create new opportunities for Democrats to expand their advantage in Maryland's congressional delegation.

Maryland Republicans also argue that Marylanders are struggling with affordability concerns, accusing Democratic leaders of engaging in partisan map-drawing. Senate Minority Leader Steve Hershey added that Senate Republicans would introduce legislation intended to lower costs if lawmakers return to Annapolis.