88R1820 JRJ-F

By:  Goodwin H.B. No. 693

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

relating to the Texas Redistricting Commission.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

SECTION 1.  Section 42.032, Election Code, is amended to read as follows:

Sec. 42.032.  REDISTRICTING: BOUNDARY CHANGES. If changes in county election precinct boundaries are necessary to give effect to a redistricting plan under Article III, Section 28a [~~28~~], [~~of the~~] Texas Constitution, each commissioners court shall order the changes before October 1 of the year in which the redistricting is done.

SECTION 2.  The heading to Title 5, Government Code, is amended to read as follows:

TITLE 5. OPEN GOVERNMENT; ETHICS; REDISTRICTING

SECTION 3.  Title 5, Government Code, is amended by adding Subtitle C to read as follows:

SUBTITLE C. REDISTRICTING

CHAPTER 581. TEXAS REDISTRICTING COMMISSION

SUBCHAPTER A. GENERAL PROVISIONS

Sec. 581.001.  DEFINITIONS. In this chapter:

(1)  "Census year," "commission," "majority party," and "minority party" have the meanings assigned by Section 28b(a), Article III, Texas Constitution.

(2)  "Immediate family member" means a person's parent, child, sibling, in-law, or other individual with whom the person has a bona fide family relationship established through blood or legal relation.

Sec. 581.002.  COMPUTATION OF TIME. For purposes of this chapter, a day means a calendar day, except that if the final day of a period within which an action may or must be performed is a Saturday, Sunday, national holiday, or state holiday, the period is extended to the next day that is not a Saturday, Sunday, or holiday.

Sec. 581.003.  RETALIATION FOR ATTENDING COMMISSION MEETING PROHIBITED. Notwithstanding any other law, an employer may not discharge, threaten to discharge, intimidate, coerce, or retaliate against an employee because of the employee's attendance or scheduled attendance at any meeting of the commission.

SUBCHAPTER B. SELECTION OF COMMISSION MEMBERS

Sec. 581.051.  APPLICATIONS. (a) Not later than January 1 of each census year, the state auditor shall initiate an application process for commission members.

(b)  The process must be open to all registered voters of this state and promote a diverse and qualified applicant pool.

Sec. 581.052.  APPLICANT REVIEW PANEL. (a) The state auditor shall establish an applicant review panel consisting of three interested citizens to screen applicants. The state auditor shall randomly draw the names of three interested citizens from a pool consisting of all citizens who have applied under procedures established by the state auditor to serve on the applicant review panel. The state auditor shall draw until the names of three interested citizens have been drawn, including:

(1)  one who would qualify as a majority party member of the commission under Section 28b(e)(1), Article III, Texas Constitution;

(2)  one who would qualify as a minority party member of the commission under Section 28b(e)(2), Article III, Texas Constitution; and

(3)  one who would qualify as an independent member of the commission under Section 28b(e)(3), Article III, Texas Constitution.

(b)  After the drawing under Subsection (a), the state auditor shall notify the three citizens whose names have been drawn that they have been selected to serve on the panel. If any of the three citizens decline to serve on the panel, the state auditor shall resume the random drawing until three citizens who meet the requirements of Subsection (a) have agreed to serve on the panel.

(c)  An individual may not serve on the panel if the individual has a conflict of interest described by Section 581.053.

(d)  A member of the panel may not receive compensation but is entitled to reimbursement of the travel expenses incurred by the member while conducting the business of the panel, as provided in the General Appropriations Act. A member's residence is considered to be the member's place of employment for purposes of reimbursement of expenses.

Sec. 581.053.  CONFLICTS OF INTEREST. (a) The state auditor shall remove an applicant with a conflict of interest from the applicant pool, including an applicant:

(1)  who at any point during the 10 years preceding the application date:

(A)  was appointed or elected to, or was a candidate for, federal or state office;

(B)  served as an officer, employee, or paid consultant of a political party or of the campaign committee of a candidate for elective federal or state office;

(C)  served as an elected or appointed member of a political party's executive committee;

(D)  was a registered lobbyist;

(E)  served as a paid staff member for Congress, the legislature, or the State Board of Education; or

(F)  contributed at least $2,000 or the amount provided by Subsection (b) to any congressional, state, or local candidate for elective public office in any year;

(2)  with an immediate family member who would be disqualified as an applicant under Subdivision (1); or

(3)  who is an employee of, a consultant to, party to a contract with, or an immediate family member of the governor, a member of the legislature, a member of the State Board of Education, or a member of Congress.

(b)  Beginning in 2039, on January 1 of each year ending in the numeral 9, the contribution amount prescribed by Subsection (a)(1)(F) is increased or decreased by an amount equal to the amount prescribed by that subsection on December 31 of the preceding year multiplied by the percentage increase or decrease during the preceding decade in the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U), U.S. City Average, as published by the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics or its successor in function.

Sec. 581.054.  SELECTION OF APPLICANT SUBPOOLS. (a) After removing individuals with conflicts of interest from the applicant pool under Section 581.053, the state auditor shall, not later than August 1 of each census year, publicize the names of individuals in the applicant pool.

(b)  From the applicant pool described by Subsection (a), the applicant review panel shall select:

(1)  a majority subpool consisting of 20 of the most qualified applicants who would qualify as majority party members under Section 28b(e)(1), Article III, Texas Constitution;

(2)  a minority subpool consisting of 20 of the most qualified applicants who would qualify as minority party members under Section 28b(e)(2), Article III, Texas Constitution; and

(3)  an independent subpool consisting of 20 of the most qualified applicants who would qualify as independent members under Section 28b(e)(3), Article III, Texas Constitution.

(c)  The applicant review panel shall select the members of the applicant subpools based on relevant analytical skills, ability to be impartial, and appreciation for this state's diverse demographics and geography.

(d)  Not later than October 1 of each census year, the applicant review panel shall present the members of the applicant subpools to the caucus leaders of the majority party and minority party of each house of the legislature as described by Section 581.055.

(e)  Before presenting the applicant subpools as provided by Subsection (d), a member of the applicant review panel may not communicate with:

(1)  a member, or a representative of a member, of the senate, the house of representatives, the State Board of Education, or Congress about any matter related to the selection process; or

(2)  a member of the applicant pool.

Sec. 581.055.  STRIKES BY CAUCUS LEADERS. (a) Not later than November 15 of each census year, the caucus leaders of the majority party and minority party of each house of the legislature may each strike up to two applicants from each applicant subpool under Section 581.054(b), for a total of eight possible strikes per applicant subpool.

(b)  After all strikes have been made as provided by Subsection (a), the caucus leaders shall present the remaining members of each applicant subpool to the state auditor.

Sec. 581.056.  DRAWING TO SELECT FIRST EIGHT COMMISSION MEMBERS. Not later than November 20 of each census year, the state auditor shall select the first eight members of the commission by randomly drawing:

(1)  three applicants from the majority subpool who were not struck under Section 581.055;

(2)  three applicants from the minority subpool who were not struck under Section 581.055; and

(3)  two applicants from the independent subpool who were not struck under Section 581.055.

Sec. 581.057.  APPOINTMENT OF SECOND SIX COMMISSION MEMBERS. (a) Not later than December 31 of each census year, the eight commission members selected under Section 581.056 shall review the remaining names in each applicant subpool and appoint to the commission:

(1)  two remaining applicants from the majority subpool who were not struck under Section 581.055;

(2)  two remaining applicants from the minority subpool who were not struck under Section 581.055; and

(3)  two remaining applicants from the independent subpool who were not struck under Section 581.055.

(b)  An appointment under Subsection (a) must be approved by at least five affirmative votes of commission members selected under Section 581.056, including at least two votes of commission members drawn from the majority subpool, at least two votes of commission members drawn from the minority subpool, and at least one vote of a commission member drawn from the independent subpool.

(c)  In making appointments under Subsection (a), the commission members shall ensure that the commission reflects this state's diversity, including racial, ethnic, geographic, and gender diversity. However, the legislature does not intend that formulas or specific ratios be applied for this purpose.

(d)  Appointments under Subsection (a) shall also be made based on relevant analytical skills and the ability to be impartial.

SUBCHAPTER C. ORGANIZATION OF COMMISSION

Sec. 581.101.  OFFICERS. The commission shall select by a vote of at least two-thirds of its members one member as chair and one member as vice chair. The chair and vice chair may not both be majority party members, minority party members, or independent members as described by Section 28b(e), Article III, Texas Constitution.

Sec. 581.102.  REMOVAL OF COMMISSION MEMBER. (a) After having been served written notice and provided with an opportunity for a response, a commission member may be removed by the governor with the concurrence of two-thirds of the members of the senate for substantial neglect of duty, gross misconduct in office, or inability to discharge the duties of office.

(b)  A commission member removed for substantial neglect of duty or gross misconduct in office may be referred to the attorney general for criminal investigation or to an appropriate administrative agency for investigation.

Sec. 581.103.  VACANCY. (a) A vacancy on the commission shall be filled, not later than the 30th day after the date the vacancy occurs, by appointment by the commission of a remaining applicant who was not struck under Section 581.055 from the same applicant subpool as the vacating member.

(b)  If a vacancy on the commission occurs and no applicant from the same applicant subpool as the vacating member is available for appointment to the commission, the state auditor and an applicant review panel shall solicit and select an appropriate number of new applicants for the applicable subpool using, to the extent practicable, the procedures provided by Sections 581.051, 581.052, 581.053, and 581.054(a)-(c) but disregarding the deadlines provided by those sections. The commission shall fill the vacancy as soon as practicable by appointment of one of the new applicants described by this subsection.

SUBCHAPTER D. COMMISSION POWERS AND DUTIES

Sec. 581.151.  OPEN MEETINGS. (a) The commission is a governmental body for purposes of Chapter 551.

(b)  Notwithstanding Chapter 551, the secretary of state must post notice on the Internet of a meeting of the commission for at least:

(1)  14 days before the date of a meeting, other than a meeting described by Subdivision (2); or

(2)  three days before the date of a meeting held in September of a year following a census year.

(c)  Except in a closed meeting authorized by Subchapter D, Chapter 551, a member or employee of the commission may not communicate with or knowingly receive communications about a redistricting matter from anyone outside of an open meeting.

Sec. 581.152.  PUBLIC INFORMATION. (a) The commission is a governmental body for purposes of Chapter 552.

(b)  The commission shall post information relating to redistricting and all data considered by the commission in a manner that ensures immediate and widespread public access.

Sec. 581.153.  EMPLOYEES AND CONTRACTORS. (a) The commission may hire employees and hire or contract with legal counsel and consultants as needed in the manner provided by this section.

(b)  The commission must make hiring, removal, or contracting decisions for employees, legal counsel, and consultants by the affirmative vote of at least nine members, including at least three majority party members, at least three minority party members, and at least three independent members as described by Section 28b(e), Article III, Texas Constitution.

(c)  The commission shall ensure that at least one of the legal counsel hired by the commission has demonstrated extensive experience and expertise in implementing and enforcing the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 (52 U.S.C. Section 10101 et seq.).

(d)  The commission shall establish for individuals described by Subsection (a):

(1)  clear criteria for hiring and removal;

(2)  communication protocols; and

(3)  a code of conduct.

(e)  To the extent practicable, the commission shall avoid selecting employees, legal counsel, or consultants who would be disqualified from commission membership because of a conflict of interest described by Section 581.053(a).

Sec. 581.154.  PUBLIC OUTREACH. (a) The commission shall establish and implement an open hearing process for public input and deliberation that is subject to public notice and promoted through a thorough outreach program to solicit broad public participation in the redistricting public review process.

(b)  The hearing process must include hearings to receive public input before the commission draws any maps and hearings following the drawing and display of any commission maps. In addition, the commission shall supplement hearings with other appropriate activities to further increase opportunities for the public to observe and participate in the review process.

(c)  The commission shall display maps for public comment in a manner designed to achieve the widest public access reasonably possible.

(d)  The commission shall publicly display preliminary maps for congressional, senate, house of representatives, and State Board of Education districts and shall accept public comment for at least 14 days after the date the preliminary maps are first publicly displayed. The commission may not display any other maps for public comment during that 14-day period.

Sec. 581.155.  PROCUREMENT AND CONTRACTING. The commission, with fiscal oversight from the comptroller, has procurement and contracting authority.

SUBCHAPTER E. ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT AND OTHER RESOURCES

Sec. 581.201.  ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT BY SECRETARY OF STATE. Following the appointment of new commission members in each census year, the secretary of state shall provide administrative support to the commission until the commission's staff and office are fully functional.

Sec. 581.202.  COMPUTER RESOURCES. The legislature shall ensure that a complete and accurate computerized database is available for redistricting and that procedures are in place to provide the public with ready access to redistricting data and computer software for drawing maps. The legislature shall coordinate these efforts with the commission from the time the commission is formed until the commission dissolves.

Sec. 581.203.  PER DIEM AND EXPENSES. (a) A commission member is entitled to a per diem of $300 or the amount provided by Subsection (b) for each day the member is engaged in commission business.

(b)  Beginning in 2040, on January 1 of each census year the per diem amount prescribed by Subsection (a) is increased or decreased by an amount equal to the amount prescribed by that subsection on December 31 of the preceding year multiplied by the percentage increase or decrease during the preceding decade in the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U), U.S. City Average, as published by the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics or its successor in function.

(c)  A commission member is eligible for reimbursement of expenses incurred in connection with the member's performance of duties under this chapter and under Sections 28a, 28b, and 28c, Article III, Texas Constitution.

(d)  For purposes of calculating expense reimbursement, a member's residence is considered to be the member's place of employment.

SECTION 4.  Section 24.945(e), Government Code, is amended to read as follows:

(e)  The legislature, the Judicial Districts Board, or the Texas [~~Legislative~~] Redistricting Commission [~~Board~~] may not redistrict the judicial districts to provide for any judicial district smaller in size than an entire county except as provided by this subsection. Judicial districts smaller in size than the entire county may be created subsequent to a general election in which a majority of the persons voting on the proposition adopt the proposition "to allow the division of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ County into judicial districts composed of parts of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ County." A redistricting plan may not be proposed or adopted by the legislature, the Judicial Districts Board, or the Texas [~~Legislative~~] Redistricting Commission [~~Board~~] in anticipation of a future action by the voters of any county.

SECTION 5.  Section 24.946(a), Government Code, is amended to read as follows:

(a)  The board shall meet in accordance with its own rules. The board shall meet at least once in each interim between regular sessions of the legislature and shall exercise its reapportionment powers only in the interims between regular legislative sessions. Meetings of the board shall be subject to the provisions of Chapter 551, except as otherwise provided by this subchapter. A reapportionment may not be ordered in the interim immediately following a regular session of the legislature in which a valid and subsisting statewide reapportionment of judicial districts is enacted by the legislature. Unless the legislature enacts a statewide reapportionment of the judicial districts following each federal decennial census, the board shall convene not later than the first Monday of June of the third year following the year in which the federal decennial census is taken to make a statewide reapportionment of the districts. The board shall complete its work on the reapportionment and file its order with the secretary of state not later than August 31 of the same year. If the Judicial Districts Board fails to make a statewide apportionment by that date, the Texas [~~Legislative~~] Redistricting Commission [~~Board~~] established by Article III, Section 28b [~~28~~], [~~of the~~] Texas Constitution shall make a statewide reapportionment of the judicial districts not later than the 90th [~~150th~~] day after the final day for the Judicial Districts Board to make the reapportionment, and that apportionment takes effect as provided by Sections 24.948 and 24.949.

SECTION 6.  Section 2058.002(a), Government Code, is amended to read as follows:

(a)  The legislature or the Texas [~~Legislative~~] Redistricting Commission [~~Board~~] under Article III, Section 28b [~~28~~], [~~of the~~] Texas Constitution may officially recognize or act on a federal decennial census before September 1 of the year after the calendar year during which the census was taken.

SECTION 7.  (a) Notwithstanding the deadline provided by Section 581.051(a), Government Code, as added by this Act, the state auditor shall initiate the initial application process described by that subsection as soon as practicable after January 1, 2030.

(b)  Notwithstanding the deadline provided by Section 581.054(a), Government Code, as added by this Act, the state auditor shall publicize the names of individuals in the initial applicant pool described by that subsection not later than May 1, 2030.

SECTION 8.  (a) Except as otherwise provided by Subsections (b) and (c) of this section, this Act takes effect January 1, 2030.

(b)  Except as otherwise provided by Subsection (c) of this section, Section 42.032, Election Code, as amended by this Act, and Sections 24.945(e), 24.946(a), and 2058.002(a), Government Code, as amended by this Act, take effect January 1, 2031.

(c)  This Act takes effect only if the constitutional amendment proposed by the 88th Legislature, Regular Session, 2023, establishing the Texas Redistricting Commission to redistrict the Texas Legislature, Texas congressional districts, and State Board of Education districts and revising procedures for redistricting is approved by the voters. If that proposed constitutional amendment is not approved by the voters, this Act has no effect.