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NEWS > POLITICS

## Maryland redistricting: A matchup between Sarah Elfreth and Andy Harris?



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Maryland Democrats are trying to **redraw election maps** years before required to do so, potentially **carving a more challenging path** for the state's lone congressional Republican. The proposal would stretch the state's one primarily Republican congressional district from the Eastern Shore across the Chesapeake Bay Bridge to Democratic-leaning suburbs.

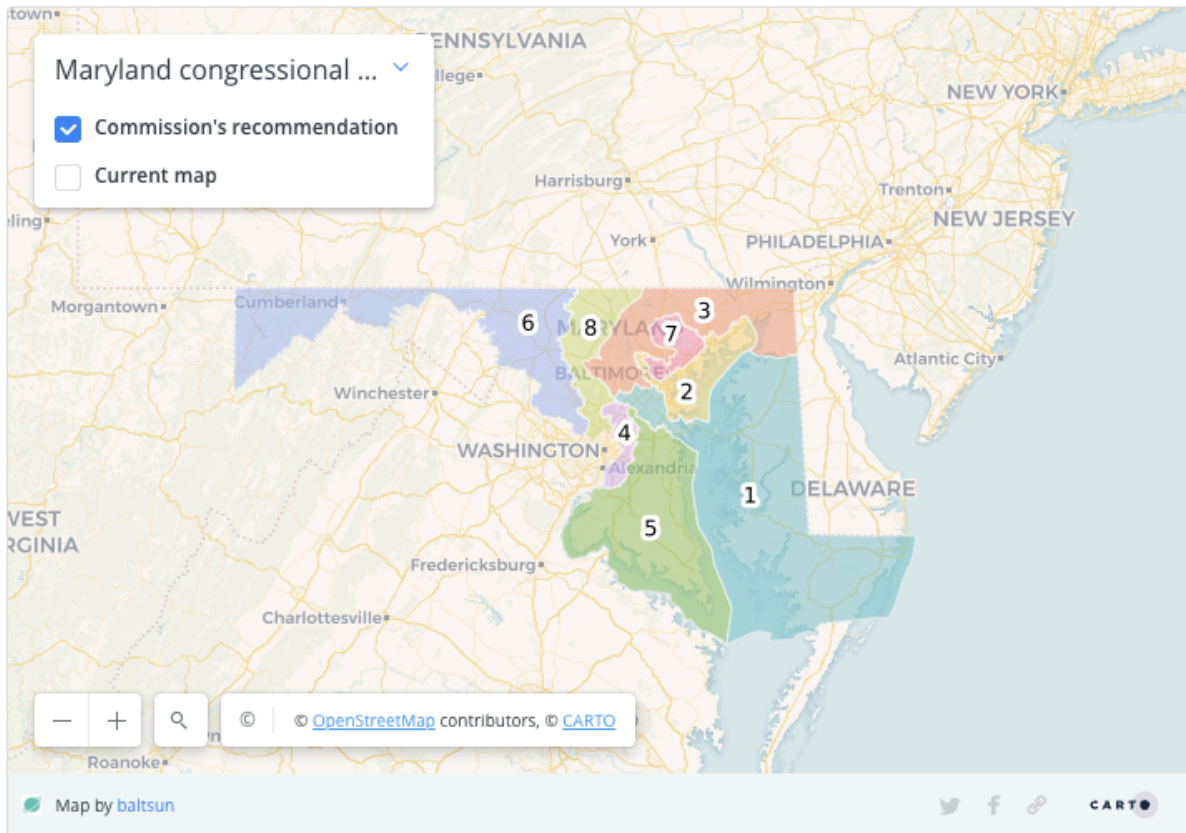
The district boundaries proposed this week would make the reelection campaign of Republican Rep. Andy Harris more difficult if the map is able to overcome steep political and legal roadblocks. U.S. Rep. Sarah Elfreth, a Democrat, lives in what would become the 1st District, setting up a potential race between Elfreth and Harris.

Harris represents District 1, which encompasses the entire Eastern Shore, Harford County and eastern Baltimore County. Under the proposed maps, the 1st District would include most of the Eastern Shore and portions of Howard and Anne Arundel counties, including Annapolis.

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## Maryland congressional redistricting

Toggle the map's layers to compare the Maryland Governor's Redistricting Advisory Commission's recommended map to the current one. Click the magnifying glass at the bottom of the map to locate an address.



Sources: *Maryland Governor's Redistricting Advisory Commission, Maryland Department of Planning*

“It will harm representation whenever you divide,” Harris said in a phone interview. “No one can argue that drawing a district across a 5-mile-long Bay Bridge respects a geographic boundary. It’s a bad idea. It’s bad for democracy, and that’s why I believe the Senate of Maryland will take the principled position of dealing with matters much more important to Maryland than a gerrymandering issue that is likely to be overturned in court.”

The recommended map largely redraws the 3rd Congressional District, currently represented by Elfreth. The proposed map would remove Annapolis and much of

Anne Arundel from the 3rd District to stretch the district from Howard County to the northern state border and Cecil County.

Elfreth, who said she recently bought a home in Annapolis, stated that she would run to represent the district she currently lives in, even if that places her in an election against Harris. While she has represented the area in Congress for around a year, Elfreth represented the Annapolis area for nearly six years as a state senator.

“I firmly believe in running in the district that you live in and know,” Elfreth said in a phone interview. “If the map as presented, or the concept of the map, moves forward from the General Assembly, I will hit the ground running.”

Redistricting normally happens at the start of the decade to account for population shifts after census results are tallied. Maryland Democrats, however, are trying to join a wave of states redistricting mid-decade to edge out seats from the minority party.

The map will face a difficult political battle, as it would need to pass out of both chambers of the Maryland General Assembly. Senate President Bill Ferguson, a Baltimore City Democrat, has been a vocal opponent of the state redistricting, given the short timeline ahead of the midterm elections and the legal turmoil that could ensue after drawing out the only Republican representative.

Democrats outnumber Republicans by a ratio of 2:1 in Maryland, but seven of the state’s eight representatives in the U.S. House are Democrats.

Harris, who chairs the hard-right House Freedom Caucus, said he doesn’t believe the map is going to go anywhere due to Ferguson’s opposition. If the map does pass the state assembly, Harris said he plans to challenge the map in court.

Under the proposed map, Harris said he would likely run in the 1st or 3rd districts, each of which include sections of his current district. He lives in Cambridge in what is and would remain as part of the 1st District.

“To not have a Republican voice in Congress ... that is a bad idea for Maryland,” Harris said.

The Republican congressman blamed the redistricting push on Gov. Wes Moore’s “presidential ambitions.” Moore has denied multiple times that he is running for president.

In 2022, the last time the Maryland legislature redistricted, the first map passed was struck down by a judge for being overly partisan. The current map was a compromise between the Democratic legislature and then-Gov. Larry Hogan, a Republican.

The move to redistrict is widely seen as a response to Texas Republicans' moves last summer to redraw their congressional district lines to favor five additional U.S. House seats for Republicans.

Other states have followed, looking for ways redraw their districts to favor each state's leading political party, including California which passed new maps to favor Democrats in five additional districts.

While the state Senate president is against redistricting, the new House of Delegates Speaker Joseline Peña-Melnyk supports the new map. The Democrat, who represents Anne Arundel and Prince George's counties, said in a statement that she believes there is enough time to pass the map before state elections this year and thinks the districts pass "constitutional and legal requirements."

Roger Hartley, a professor of public and international affairs at the University of Baltimore, said Democrats risk sectioning off too many of their voters from current left-leaning districts by redrawing the lines. There is also a question, Hartley said, of how a member of Congress could represent a district so diverse as the proposed 1st District.

Republican Del. Christopher Adams, the chair of the Eastern Shore delegation to the General Assembly, worries that representation could get lost for the region if these maps were implemented.

"That's number one bad business, because it disenfranchises Eastern Shore voters who have duly elected Andy Harris, our congressman. But more importantly, it speaks to the lack of focus on some very difficult budget conversations coming forward," Adams said.

Others, however, argue that the Bay Bridge does connect communities already across the bridge. Dave McCarthy from the District 30 Democratic Club, which includes Annapolis, said people cross the bridge every day for work, health care and other needs.

"There are very strong economic bonds, along with some cultural bonds as well," McCarthy said.

*Have a news tip? Contact Katharine Wilson at [kwilson@baltsun.com](mailto:kwilson@baltsun.com).*