

Minutes of the Advisory Task Force on Composition of Judicial Districts

June 4, 2019

The meeting was called to order on June 4, 2019 at 1 pm CDT by Chairman Telford Forgety. Chairman Forgety joined Russell Johnson and Kim Nelson via video conference from Knoxville, TN. J.B. Cox, Bo Burk, Kim Helper and Craig Fickling appeared in person at the AOC in Nashville. Jim Kyle, and John Ryder joined the group via teleconference.

Chairman Forgety welcomed guests in Nashville who introduced themselves. In attendance were Rep. Mike Carter and Rep. Johnny Garrett, as well as Rachel Harmon, Ceesha Lofton and Michelle Consiglio-Young from the Administrative Office of the Courts.

J.B. Cox moved to allow electronic participation by Task Force Members under Tenn. Code Ann. §8-44-108. The motion was seconded by Craig Fickling and carried upon a full roll call vote of the members present. Craig Fickling moved to approve the minutes from the April 29, 2019 meeting, the motion was seconded by JB Cox, and carried upon a full roll call vote of the members present.

Rep. Carter stated that Chattanooga DA Neal Pinkston had reached out to him for his thoughts on redistricting. Kim Helper explained that the DAs Conference hoped to be on the same page as any recommendations from the Task Force. Rep. Garrett encouraged legislators to bring any information on redistricting to the Task Force's attention.

There was no new report from the AOC. A county by county breakdown on case information was prepared by Ann Lynn Walker of the AOC and sent to Chairman Forgety for review.

Chairman Forgety discussed the public hearing held in East Tennessee. He noted that everything went smoothly and expressed thanks to the staff at Roane State Community College and all who assisted in arranging the public hearing. Chairman Forgety noted that the Judges from the 1st Judicial District submitted an online comment following one recommendation at the hearing to change the makeup of the District. The judges are opposed to any changes. C. Phillip Bivins also submitted a comment on line suggesting that Lauderdale County could join Dyer and Lake Counties, while Henry County could move to the District with Obion and Weakley Counties. His suggestions mirror the prior recommendations from the Judge's Redistricting Committee. Jim Kyle received a letter from Wallace Harville supporting the election of a rural judge in the 21st Judicial District.

Russell Johnson and Craig Fickling are still working to breakdown caseload numbers by county and district for both the District Attorneys and Public Defenders. One of the challenges is that the Big Four counties track much of their information and may benefit from local funding for additional attorney and staff positions. Additional meetings were recommended as the Task Force completes the public hearing process and works toward a preliminary report. The Task Force hopes to meet on July 29, August 19 (target date for preliminary report), Sept. 15, Oct. 21 and November 18th.

Chairman Forgety questioned whether the Task Force should go back to West Tennessee to allow speakers to comment on the allocation of resources, as that wasn't a publicized consideration prior to the first hearing in West Tennessee. JB Cox moved to have an additional hearing in West Tennessee, the motion was seconded by Bo Burk, and carried by a vote of 7 – 2 with two members absent.

The Task Force agreed to have a hearing in Memphis on July 15, 2019 to allow the public to address any redistricting concerns, including the allocation of resources.

Discussion also followed about how best to allow comments on a preliminary draft from the Task Force.

In preparation for the June 12, 2019 public hearing, Chairman Forgety reviewed statistics about Middle Tennessee. Noted were the travel time within the 23rd District which can reach close to 85 minutes as well as the 13th District with a travel time of close to 80 minutes. Williamson and Rutherford Counties showed the highest growth when measured from the 2010 Census figures.

Brief discussion followed regarding the trial court judge's look at redistricting which suggested moving Lauderdale County to the 29th District and Henry County to the 27th District. The Task Force has made no decisions at this time.

With no further business, the Task Force meeting adjourned at 2:18 p.m. CDT.

Respectfully Submitted:

Kim Helper