

The Ohio General Assembly has been considering possible redistricting reforms. Redistricting reform requires changing the Ohio Constitution. Three-fifths of the members of both the Ohio Senate and the Ohio House have to vote for passage of amendments to the Ohio Constitution.

The Ohio Senate passed a redistricting resolution, Senate Joint Resolution 5, on September 23, 2009. SJR 5 is sponsored by Senator Jon Husted (R-Kettering), the Republican candidate for Ohio Secretary of State. This resolution is focused on changing the make-up of the Reapportionment Board and gives priority to compactness and values creating competitive districts if compactness requirements are met.

On May 27, 2010, the Ohio House passed another redistricting resolution, House Joint Resolution 15. This resolution is sponsored by State Representative Tom Letson (D-Warren). HJR 15 is designed to reform how districts of the Ohio General Assembly are drawn. House Joint Resolution 15 calls for an open and public competition to draw legislative state districts based on specific criteria or goals.

There are significant differences between the two proposed redistricting resolutions—SJR 5 and HJR 15— and three-fifths of both Houses of the General Assembly have to agree on the specifics of a Constitutional amendment before it is sent to the voters for their final say.

Senate Joint Resolution 5 creates a bipartisan redistricting board and focuses almost entirely on keeping municipalities together and compactness. Competition is a factor in redrawing the lines but it is not well-defined in SJR 5 and is only tertiary. While SJR 5 changes the redrawing for both state legislative races and US Congress, HJR 15 only addresses redistricting for the Ohio House and Ohio Senate. House Joint Resolution 15 does not change the makeup of the Reapportionment Board and focuses on different, clearly defined criteria— fair representation, competitive districting and compactness.

In order for this redistricting reform to be placed on the Ohio ballot this November, the three-fifths of the members of the Ohio House and the Ohio Senate must agree on not only on the need for reform but the exact language of the reform measures by August 4.