



41 West Street, Suite 700 □ Boston, MA 02111 □ (617) 542-8683 □ [www.massvote.org](http://www.massvote.org)

## **Redistricting Massachusetts: drawing our future, learning from the past**

In Massachusetts, ethnic and racial groups have fought tooth and claw for every bit of political representation.

The battle continues. While over 20% of the population of Massachusetts is made up of people of color, the two US Senators and ten Members of Congress who represent our state are all white. Eleven are men. (Niki Tsongas is the sole woman).

Boston is one of the major entry cities for immigrants into the US, and its immigrant population grew by 62% between 1990 and 2000. Most of the cities of Massachusetts have large numbers of people of color. Several, including Boston, are "majority-minority." Still, fewer than 10% of the elected legislators in the State House and State Senate are people of color. With a legislature that is over 90% Democratic, Massachusetts has some of the lowest rates of legislative turnover in the nation. Members routinely stay for decades. Without competition, accountability and good government are not always present, and the last three State House Speakers left under ethical clouds.

In the 2010 US Census, Massachusetts lost a seat in Congress -- not because the state lost population (actually, Massachusetts grew by 3.1%, to 6.5 million) but because the population did not grow quickly enough to keep up with the US average.

Over the coming months, the legislature will draw new lines. Boundaries must be finished by the second week of November, 2011.

Redistricting creates opportunities. "Majority-minority" opportunity seats could be created for Congress (probably around Boston) and for the State Senate and State House. In cities like Boston, Worcester, Springfield, and Lowell, new districts could give opportunities for people of color, Latinos, African-Americans and Asian-Americans, to have a stronger say in government. Much depends on how state senate seats, state house seats, and local city council districts are drawn. The process is extremely important -- the people need time to tell legislators their hopes and interests around redistricting before maps are created. Once maps are drafted, there should be at least three weeks for people and organizations to examine and review them. All maps should be posted online. Comment from the public should be welcomed, recorded, and disseminated to legislators. MassVOTE has already had very positive early conversations with House Redistricting Chairman Mike Moran and Senate Redistricting Chairman Stan Rosenberg.

The civil rights community in Massachusetts knows how to take on this kind of fight -- and win. In the last redistricting process, MassVOTE, the NAACP, the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights, *Oiste*, the Massachusetts Latino Political Organization, and many others came for a full and complete Census count and an intense redistricting campaign. We organized the community to take part in redistricting at the State House, and brought and won a federal suit to ensure fair district lines. With support, Massachusetts can lead again.



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# Statewide Redistricting Coalition Archive: Case Study of a Victory

**Dorchester** 6th Suffolk District  
A Case of Political Apartheid

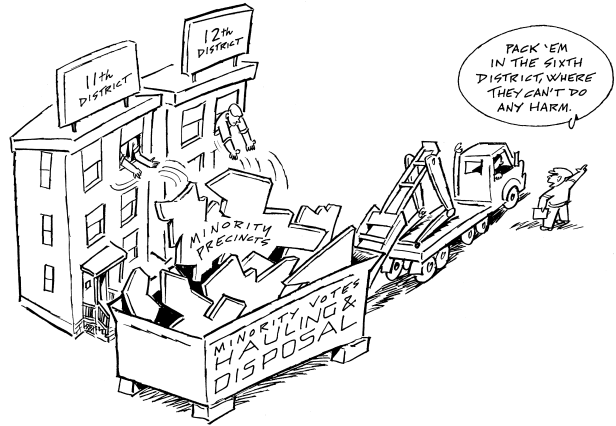
**Mattapan** 12th Suffolk District  
From Mattapan to Milton—in the  
click of a mouse

## The Story

**Start:** In 2001, the 6th Suffolk District was about 83% Black, Latino and other voters of color. Its neighbor, the 12th Suffolk District, was 74% people of color.

**Background:** A district with a “packed” population of color over 90% eliminates the opportunity for some of those voters of color to influence representation in a neighboring district. This goes against redistricting principles and Federal law.

**First Redistricting:** By super-packing the 6th Suffolk district with people of color, the House created a District which resembles South African apartheid-era townships – 98% people of color. This township-like district ensured that people of color would have as little influence as possible in bordering districts. The 12th Suffolk was reduced to 60% people of color, including many immigrants who could not yet vote.



**Our Proposal:** We suggested a map that would keep the 6th district 78% people of color, and keep the 12th district 72% people of color. MassVOTE, the NAACP, the Black Political Task Force, Oiste, and other groups came together to advocate for change in the legislature, and, when they would not listen, took our case to U.S. District Court. The courthouse was packed daily, and the press was sympathetic, thanks to an aggressive community organizing and education campaign.

**Resolution: Victory.** The 12th Suffolk retained over 70% people of color when the court modified the state's redistricting plan in 2003, and the 6th district stayed below 90%. In 2005, the 12th Suffolk district gained a representative who is a person of color (Haitian-American woman Linda Dorcena Forry).



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## What Makes For Fair Redistricting?

**One-Person-One-Vote:** Congressional districts be exactly equal in population. State House and Senate districts may have +/- 5% deviation in population; however, recent litigation implies that the Supreme Court may reduce the amount of allowed deviation – the more equal in population, the better.

**Communities of Interest:** Communities with similar voting patterns, party identification, political opinions, social group membership, linguistic minorities, and /or a histories of racial exclusion should be grouped together.

**Consistency:** When possible, it is better not to change district lines radically.

**Compactness:** Districts, where possible, should respect political boundaries (i.e. precincts, city and town lines) and keep neighborhoods together.

**Voting Rights for Everyone:** Diluting the voting power of people of color is illegal under the 1965 Voting Rights Act and the 1982 Amendment which prohibits state legislatures from drawing districts that dilute a citizen's right to vote on "account of race or color." Subsequent court decisions may require that **majority-minority districts** be created if communities of interest are sufficiently large and geographically compact, politically cohesive, and have been historically disenfranchised. Minority vote dilution schemes, namely *stacking*, *cracking* and *packing* are illegal and must be avoided.

- "Stacking" is when a large minority population is combined with a slightly larger white population, rejecting the opportunity to create a majority-minority district.
- "Cracking" is when a large minority population is divided and dispersed into separate majority white districts ensuring that there enough voters of color in any district to elected their candidate.
- "Packing" is when a large minority population is drawn into one district, limiting influence to one instead of two or three districts.

**Public Participation:** The people must have a voice.

- Legislative leaders should post all maps online, and allow for comment to be submitted from citizens in every corner of Massachusetts.
- Comments, whether submitted by mail, on the telephone, in person, or online, should be disseminated to legislators and recorded as a matter of public record.
- There should be ideas sought before maps are produced.
- After maps are released, there should be at least three weeks for the public to comment before votes are taken to amend or adopt the maps.

Get Involved! Join MassVOTE and the 2010 Redistricting Coalition. Contact Cheryl Crawford at 617-542-8683 ext 211 or email [redistricting@massvote.org](mailto:redistricting@massvote.org).