

# Redistrict deal draws criticism

BY RACHELLE BLIDNER

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Voting rights advocates on Tuesday criticized a “back-room deal” between Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone and Presiding Officer Kevin McCaffrey to redraw legislative lines, saying the pact could lead to disenfranchisement of minority voters.

Civil rights attorney Frederick Brewington said the deal announced Monday — and crafted with “no Black person in the room when it happened” — would “trample on” voting rights laws by overturning a Democratic plan that Brewington and other supporters say improved representation of minority residents.

“It is a backward step for Suffolk County by 30 years,” Brewington told *Newsday*.

Criticism by Brewington and others came on the eve of an expected vote by the Suffolk County Legislature on a redistricting compromise announced Monday by Bellone, a Democrat, and McCaffrey, the Republican legislative leader.

Under the deal, a bipartisan commission would convene to propose maps for 18 new legislative districts. The agreement would undo a redistricting plan that Democrats pushed through Dec. 31, hours before they lost control of the legislature to Republicans.

With the Republican caucus holding an 11-7 majority, the deal would need at least one Democratic vote to pass.

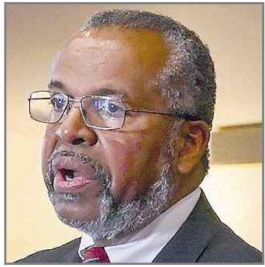
But Suffolk Democratic chairman Richard Schaffer said he didn’t expect any Democratic legislators to support the deal in the legislative vote Wednesday.

“It’s not going to have 12 votes tomorrow,” Schaffer told *Newsday* on Tuesday.

Minority Leader Jason Richberg (D-West Babylon) said he had “that same expectation,” noting Democrats had not seen the proposed legislation by Tuesday afternoon.

Neither Bellone’s office nor McCaffrey responded immediately to a request for comment Tuesday.

McCaffrey said Monday the deal shows his commitment “to establishing a fair redistricting process and legisla-



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**Frederick Brewington**

tive map that reflects regional demographic trends.”

McCaffrey acknowledged he would have “some arm-twisting to do and some heart-to-heart discussions” with legislators to get enough support.

Republicans said the Democratic plan violates the county charter because it was created without input from a bipartisan commission, which under the charter is responsible for proposing new district lines by Feb. 1.

Under McCaffrey’s and Bellone’s deal, a bipartisan commission would have until Aug. 1 to propose new district lines and hold 12 public hearings.

The deal would keep the four “majority-minority districts” featured in the Democratic plan.

But Brewington and other voting rights advocates expressed concern that communities of color would be packed together or split apart — particularly if the commission fails to agree on new lines and the legislature draws its own.

“I’m concerned about what the districts will look like,” said Dr. Beverly Dean, president of the Brookhaven Rosa Parks Democratic Association.

For the deal to work, Bellone would have to veto the Democratic plan. Bellone’s office said his action will depend on Wednesday’s vote.

In a Jan. 19 letter to Bellone, the Long Island NAACP said vetoing the Democratic plan would “rob” Black residents of rights that had been gained and “damage the very rights that Black people died for.”

The potential to “dismantle the maps that provide a more equitable landscape [is] disturbing,” NAACP Long Island regional director Tracey Edwards said in the letter.