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Legal Steps to Battle District Lines

By Monte R. Young

STAFF WRITER

Charging that proposed State Senate district lines would discriminate against Long Island's minority communities, civil rights and community activists yesterday backed a legal effort to create new minority districts in Nassau and Suffolk counties.

Representatives of groups including the NAACP and the Suffolk County Latino Voting Rights Committee announced their support of a longtime Uniondale resident who is moving to sue top state officials over the configuration of the proposed lines.

"It is a clear and concise warning to the governor and all those on the [redistricting] task force that if you do not change your mind . . . then you will go to court," Frederick Brewington, a Hempstead civil rights attorney, said at a news conference in Mineola.

Mark Hansen, a spokesman for State Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno (R-Brunswick), said the Senate lines were "drafted to ensure adequate representation to citizens throughout the state and pro-

tect the rights of minority voters . . . and [to] ensure that the Senate remains responsive to the needs of citizens."

Gov. George Pataki, however, "has made it clear that he has concerns regarding the proposed lines that were drawn by the legislature, and he is hopeful after the public comment period, the appropriate changes and improvements will be made," said spokesman Joe Conway.

Brewington said he sent notices of intent to sue on behalf of Mervyn Campbell, a 22-year resident of Uniondale, to defendants including Bruno, Pataki and Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver (D-Manhattan). A notice of intent is a necessary precursor to the filing of a lawsuit.

The legal maneuvering comes after preliminary redistricting plans left the boundaries of the nine Senate districts on Long Island — all held by Republicans — largely intact. Blacks and Hispanics have complained that the plan ignores the minority population growth of the last decade. They are pushing to create a predominantly minority district in each of Nassau and Suffolk.

Another preliminary redistricting plan, however, does call for an Assembly seat favoring Latinos in the Brentwood section of Suffolk County.

According to census records, African-Americans and Hispanics make up almost 20 percent of the total population in Nassau and Suffolk.

Blacks and Hispanics live in compact communities in Freeport, Roosevelt, Hempstead and Uniondale in the Town of Hempstead in Nassau, and in Amityville, Wyandanch, Brentwood and Central Islip in the towns of Babylon and Islip in Suffolk.

The intent to file suit says that the state redistricting task force has failed to hold meetings in Nassau County. It also charges that the state task force is insensitive to minorities because no one on the panel is black or Latino.

The New York State Legislative Task Force on Demographic Research and Reapportionment is holding hearings statewide, including a session on March 18 at the Suffolk County legislative auditorium in Hauppauge, before finalizing the lines.