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# Suffolk Redistricting Challenged

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A day after the Suffolk County Legislature finally approved a proposal to draw new district boundaries, Hispanic and African-American residents on Friday moved to challenge the plan in court as unfair.

An attorney for eight Democratic legislators who did not vote for the plan told a U.S. District judge they also would seek to join in a legal action over the high-stakes issue that could lay the blueprint for political power for the next decade.

In March, a group of minority Suffolk residents claimed in a lawsuit that their civil rights were being violated because the county had not redrawn district lines as required after the 2000 census.

On Wednesday, U.S. District Judge

## Minority residents go to court

Arthur Spatt ordered the lawmakers to approve a plan by Thursday or the court would impose one.

Lawmakers passed an altered version of one of five plans it had been considering. All 10 Republicans voted for the measure, which pits incumbent Democrats Ginny Fields of Oakdale and William Lindsay of Holbrook against each other in the same district. Seven Democrats voted no and one abstained.

County Executive Robert Gaffney has scheduled a public hearing on the plan for Tuesday, May 27, at 2 p.m. in the H. Lee Dennison Building in Hauppauge. Gaffney has until next month to sign the plan into law or veto it.

In court Friday, Frederick Brewington, the Hempstead attorney representing the plaintiffs, argued that the approved plan diluted the voting power of minorities and said he was prepared to provide evidence supporting that claim. He said the judge had ordered legislators to "keep in mind and consider . . . the rights of the minority community. They have failed to do so."

But Spatt said that because the redistricting bill had yet to become law, it was too early to try to strike down the plan or for the court to appoint a special master to assist in scrutinizing the plan.

"An attack now is premature," Spatt said, adding that, "unfortunately, we have time constraints." Political par-

ties are to begin circulating nominating petitions for candidates on June 3.

He told Brewington to amend his complaint by Monday and explain why a challenge now would be valid.

William Wexler of Babylon, the attorney for the Democratic legislators, said the lawmakers also believed the plan violated federal voting rights statutes by diluting the voting power of Hispanics and wished to join in challenging it.

But Deputy County Attorney Robert Cabbie questioned whether the legislators as individuals had the legal right to sue their own body.

All the parties are due back in court Thursday morning for a hearing.

Cabbie said the plaintiffs had originally demanded that a plan be passed. "That's been done . . . To now attack the plan, it's a judicial mess."