

Redistricting advocated for Cordova, SE

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Southeastern Alaska is over-represented and should give up one of its six state House seats to Southcentral election districts, Rep. Terry Martin told the Reapportionment Board during a public hearing last week.

The Anchorage Republican was the first person to testify during the panel's public hearing on possible options to amend a redistricting program approved in 1981 by then Gov. Jay Hammond, a Republican.

The board members, four Democrats and a Republican appointed Oct. 20, face a tough task.

They must walk a tight-rope between a superior court judge's order that the amended plan be a simple revision, and directives from Gov. Bill Sheffield that revised census data, which adds 1,039 Eagle River residents left out of the 1981 plan, be included.

That addition could lead to wholesale remapping of Anchorage election districts.

Judge Milton Souter ordered a new redistricting plan to remove Cordova from District 2 — the "Iceworm" district stretching from Prince William

Sound to Southeastern Alaska, and he said it should be carried out simply, having the effects of "a ripple, not a crashing wave."

He said Cordova does not share social and economic ties with the other communities in its district.

Board Chairman Willie Hensley asked Martin whether he would object to adding the adjusted census data to the redistricting equation, saying, "Some people are upset if we do, and some people are upset if we don't."

"That pales in comparison to the statewide problem," Martin said. "No matter how you try, I don't think you can solve the Cordova problem in

the narrow guidelines you have."

Souter should be asked to give the board more leeway, he said.

Adding Cordova to a district outside Southeastern Alaska would lead to even less population in that section of the state for census purposes, and add to an existing problem of

too many representatives for too few people, he said.

The board prepared two major options. The first would shift Cordova as ordered. The second incorporates the new Eagle River numbers and is being presented as three separate plans during two weeks of public hearings by the board.

Republicans have attacked the second option, saying it's a thinly disguised Democratic attempt to remap Anchorage and boot several Republican lawmakers out of office.

The board must turn over its recommendations to Sheffield by Jan. 3, and he has until Feb. 3 to issue the final, revised redistricting plan.