

VIRGINIA SENATORS AND DELEGATES TO HOLD JOINT REDISTRICTING HEARING

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After some tension over the issue, senators and delegates have now agreed to hold a joint public hearing to discuss legislative redistricting.

State Sen. Janet Howell (D-Fairfax) said delegates have agreed to a proposal from senators that the two chambers jointly hold a public hearing in Richmond next week. For the last several months, the Privileges and Elections Committees of each chamber have been holding separate public hearings around the state.

Howell had been highly critical of delegates for declining to hold joint hearings previously. In fund-raising appeals and public comments, she cited the separate hearings as a sign that the House was not interested in a cooperative, bipartisan process.

Delegates had responded that the two committees had not in the past held public hearings on the issue so early--the General Assembly will hold a special session on redistricting in April. They had said they planned to hold public hearings with senators in the spring.

This is the first time since Reconstruction that a divided legislature must come to an agreement over new House, Senate and congressional lines. The squabbling over joint public hearings has been widely seen as a bad portent for the legislature's ability to smoothly come to an agreement over the tricky political issue.

But Howell told reporters and editors attending Tuesday's AP Day at the Capitol in Richmond that she received a call on the issue in the morning. According to House staff, delegates were interested in joining the senators for a previously scheduled hearing to be held on Dec. 17.