



NEWS:

Bills Would Change the Nature of Delaware Elections

April 21, 2017 – Two bipartisan bills currently moving through the Delaware General Assembly seek to make long-sought reforms to the state's election processes.

The first bill ([House Bill 89](#)) would move Delaware's primary elections from late summer to mid-spring.

Under the measure sponsored by State Reps. Stephanie Bolden, D-Wilmington East, and Danny Short, R-Seafood, Delaware's primary races would be held on the same day as its presidential primary.

Primary elections for all political parties would be conducted on the fourth Tuesday in April, even during years when no presidential primary occurred.

Currently, Delaware's primary elections are held on the "second Tuesday after the first Monday in September." That timing has long been the subject of consternation for those running in primary contests. The winners must often face an opponent in the general election less than two months later, leaving little time to reorganize, replenish campaign war chests, and to gain the backing of angry supporters of defeated primary candidates.

According to Department of Elections' officials, in years where the state holds a presidential primary, taxpayers would save about \$1 million by simultaneously staging the primary elections.



State Rep. Danny Short

A similar measure was attempted last year, easily clearing the House but failing in the Senate on the last night of session. In its most-recent incarnation, the bill again earned overwhelming House support, passing by a vote of 34 to 6. It is pending action in the Senate Elections & Government Affairs Committee.

The second bill ([Senate Bill 27](#)) -- sponsored by State Sens. Bryan Townsend, D-Newark-Bear, and Brian Pettyjohn, R-Georgetown -- seeks to establish an Independent Redistricting Commission for Delaware. The group would be charged with carrying out the often contentious process of redrawing the boundaries of Delaware's legislative districts every ten years, following the U.S. Census. The mandated task ensures balanced representation in government.

Presently, Delaware's redistricting is conducted by whichever political party happens to hold the majority in the General Assembly's chambers at the time. It includes little in the way of transparency or meaningful public input, with lines drawn to provide maximum partisan advantage. The process has sometimes included maneuvers to eliminate potential candidates from specific districts, or moving two rival party incumbents into the same district.

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, [13 states](#) have commissions with the primary mission of redrawing state legislative district lines. The proposal, which has already cleared the Senate, 12 to 7, contains provisions for the selection of the commission's nine members; mandates public hearings; and designates the Supreme Court to resolve any challenges that may arise.

SB 27 has been assigned to the House Administration Committee for consideration. Lawmakers return to work Tuesday following their two-week Easter Recess.