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## **Liberty Road group challenges Balto. Co. redistricting**

### **Residents kick off petition drive for referendum**

By Alison Knezevich, The Baltimore Sun

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Residents of neighborhoods along Liberty Road in Baltimore County are hoping to gather enough signatures to challenge the County Council's decision to redraw political lines for the next local election.

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Leaders of the Liberty Road Community Council and neighborhood associations in the area met at the Randallstown Community Center on Wednesday afternoon to announce a petition drive to bring the issue to a countywide referendum.

"We're upset with the redistricting plan because it splits communities," said Christine Cypress, president of the Liberty Road group. "It reduces our voting power."

The plan, which council members approved unanimously Monday, would shift the Woodlawn High School precinct of about 6,000 people from Councilman Kenneth N. Oliver's 4th District to Councilman Tom Quirk's 1st District. Both are Democrats.

A coalition of community associations, as well as the Baltimore County branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, is backing the referendum effort. The 4th District is the county's only one with a majority of black voters.

Under the redistricting map, which would take effect in 2014, the Social Security Administration campus and the district's portion of an economic enterprise zone — where businesses can receive tax credits as part of an effort to spur redevelopment — would shift to the 1st District. The plan also would reduce the 4th District's population from about 117,000 to about 110,800.

Oliver is supporting the referendum.

"I think it's a very good plan, because they're still upset," he said.

He had planned to offer an amendment to keep the Woodlawn precinct, but withdrew it at the Monday meeting because he didn't have enough support on the council. Oliver said he is considering a lawsuit to challenge the redistricting plan.

The county charter requires people seeking a redistricting referendum to gather signatures equal to least 10 percent of the number of people who voted for governor in the last election. That would amount to about 28,825 people.

The groups must gather at least one-third of the signatures within 45 days of the council's vote Monday. After that, they would have to get the rest of the signatures within 30 days.

If the groups succeed, the voters would consider the referendum in next year's general election.

Cypress said her group hopes to coordinate with disappointed residents in the Towson area, where some communities also are upset with the redistricting plan because it will take them out of the county seat's district. Areas that are now represented by Republican Councilman David Marks would shift to Democratic Councilwoman Cathy Bevins' district.

Antony Gross, president of the Loch Hill Community Association, said his group hasn't decided whether to support the referendum.

The association has a meeting scheduled with Bevins on Tuesday and a board meeting after that. Gross said his community is still "very disappointed" but hopes they can work with Bevins.

"If she can satisfy us, then we probably would not participate" in the referendum, he said.

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