

From Larry Helminiak, SCBA Board Member and Government Relations Chairperson

July 2017

I would guess that a high percentage of SCBA members vote. At least, I would hope so. I wonder how many voters actually understand exactly what determines what district we vote in, and why. It's called gerrymandering.

All states, regardless of size, have two Senators who go to Washington. In the House of Representatives, each state has a different number, from Montana with 1 to California with 53. Why is that? How are the 435 members assigned?

Every 10 years, there is a national census. Right now, the number of people living in the United States is about 330 million. The government takes the total number of people and divides it by the number of seats in the House of Representatives. So we divide 330 million by 435 and come up with 758,620. Each state will get ONE Representative for every 758,620 residents. Maryland, with 6 million residents, has eight, for now, based on the 2010 census. That could change after the 2020 census.

The big question is "Who determines what district I live in?" One would assume that this is an easy question to answer; but it's not. Get familiar with the word "GERRYMANDERING." What does it mean and where did the word come from?

In the 1880's, there was a governor of Massachusetts named Elbridge Gerry. After one census, he influenced the division of the districts assigned to Massachusetts by drawing a map. Even though the number of PEOPLE for each district was correct, he split the state so that it would give the advantage to his party. When you looked at the map of districts, some were SO distorted that they looked like a SALAMANDER. Thus, Gerry + Salamander = Gerrymandering. It simply means that the map is drawn to the advantage of a particular party as opposed to simply geography.

Of the 435 districts in the United States today, Maryland is the SECOND WORST in Gerrymandering. A case will soon go to the Supreme Court to see if it can be simplified, eliminating Gerrymandering as much as possible.

Whoever is Governor in 2020 will supervise how districts are drawn in Maryland. How you vote in 2018 will determine how those districts are drawn.