

# New districts due State sets January deadline

By Tim Richard  
Staff writer

The Michigan Legislature has a court-imposed deadline of Jan. 15 to reapportion itself.

Otherwise, a special panel of judges will do the job by Feb. 15, the state Supreme Court said.

"There's a low probability the Legislature will agree on a plan by Jan. 15," said state Rep. Willis Bulard, R-Highland, a ranking Republican on the reapportionment issue.

"This year we're done by Thursday. I guess we're going to be in session Jan. 8 for a couple of days."

"You don't have to be in session for the leadership to agree," Bulard said, but he indicated chances of agreement look dim.

"The Democrats haven't even gotten together on their own plan," he added.

State Rep. Maxine Berman, D-Southfield, and chair of the elections

committee, is somewhat more hopeful.

"I think there's some chance of our doing it," she said, but she is willing to sit down and talk with the leadership. It's worth a shot.

"There's maybe a 50% chance of agreement, but whether we can do it by Jan. 15th is debatable."

**THE STATE** Supreme Court Monday also appointed a three-judge panel to reapportion the Legislature if lawmakers themselves reach a stalemate.

The high court gave the judicial panel until Feb. 15 to act.

Members of that panel are Harold Hood, Detroit, a judge of the Court of Appeals; T. John Leinhardt, retired Court of Appeals judge and former Democratic lieutenant governor; and William R. Peterson, former circuit judge from Muskegon and Westford counties in northern lower Michigan.

The high court's action seems to

assure Michigan will have new districts in place long before filing deadline for the August primaries. Ten years ago, a primary had to be delayed because of a deadlock on reapportionment.

**ABOUT ALL** the political parties can agree on, at this point, is that districts may be 8.2 percent larger or smaller than the ideal: 224,613 in each Senate district, 84,503 in each House district.

The ruling doesn't cover congressional districting, which is before a federal court panel. Congressional districting is expected to be far tougher because Michigan loses two of its 19 U.S. representatives due to population stagnation.

The Supreme Court told lawmakers to follow guidelines set in its 1982 reapportionment decision and in the federal Voting Rights Act. The latter guarantees minority populations can't be split to dilute their strength.

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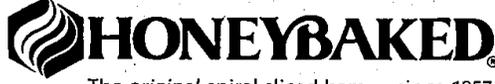
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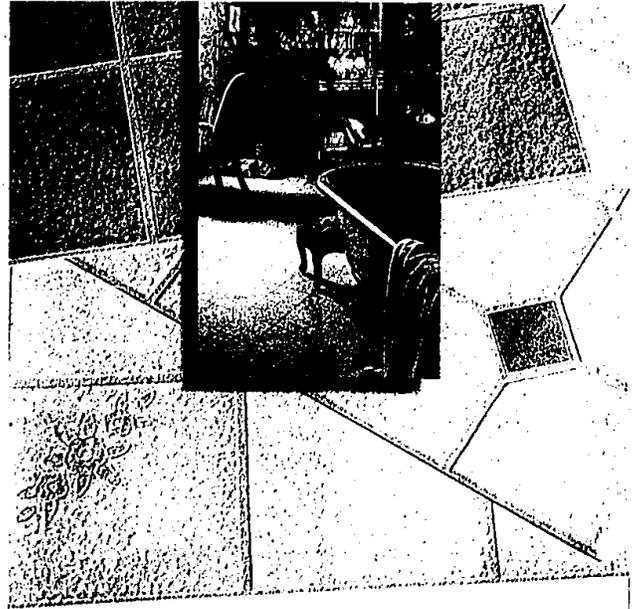
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