

## Texas House Democrats Flee State to Block Republican Redistricting Plan

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Texas House Democrats left the state on August 3 to derail a Republican redistricting proposal that would expand the GOP's hold on congressional seats ahead of the 2026 midterms. Their absence prevents the Texas House from reaching a quorum, halting all legislative activity during the ongoing special session.

The Democrats, who travelled mainly to Chicago with support from Democratic governors in Illinois and New York, aim to block a proposed redistricting map that could hand Republicans control of up to 30 of Texas's 38 congressional seats. Under the Texas Constitution, the House requires a two-thirds presence, 100 of its 150 members, for official proceedings to continue.

Governor Greg Abbott sharply criticized the move, warning of legal consequences for those who refuse to return. Attorney General Ken Paxton echoed that position, saying absent members could be subject to arrest. Abbott also referenced a 2021 legal opinion suggesting lawmakers who repeatedly fail to carry out their duties could be expelled.

The proposed redistricting maps target key districts in South Texas and urban centres, including Austin, Dallas, and Houston. Critics argue the plans would dilute minority representation, while Republican leaders insist the changes reflect population shifts and electoral trends.

Democratic lawmakers said the decision to flee the state followed concerns that the maps would undercut Black and Latino voters. They also cited past efforts to defend voting rights and fair representation as justification for their latest walkout.

To deter repeat quorum breaks, the Texas House in 2023 adopted rules imposing a \$500 fine for each day a legislator is absent without excuse. Sources suggest Democratic donors have offered to cover those costs, though campaign finance rules prohibit using political funds for penalties.

The protest recalls similar standoffs in Texas legislative history. In both 2003 and 2021, Democratic lawmakers left the state to stall

controversial measures, including earlier redistricting and voting legislation.

Meanwhile, U.S. House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries has met with Texas Democrats, pledging support and urging the public to stay informed on the issue. He called the effort part of a broader national battle over political fairness and voter representation.

The special session also includes items such as flood recovery and education policy. With Democrats refusing to return, the legislature remains stalled on multiple fronts.