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## GOP files suit over Democrat-drawn redistricting map

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SPRINGFIELD — Republican leaders of the Illinois General Assembly filed a lawsuit this week over the state's new legislative map and one Chicago law professor said she thinks they "are going to have a tough row to hoe" in their battle.

Senate Republican Leader Christine Radogno and House Republican Leader Thomas H. Cross III sued the Illinois State Board of Elections on Wednesday in U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois, claiming that the Democrat-drawn map violates the Federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 as well as the Illinois and U.S. Constitutions.

The duo, which is joined by a state representative and a handful of black and Latino residents as plaintiffs in the suit, contends that the Democrats' redistricting plan unfairly targets Republicans and discriminates against black and Latino people.

The Republican leaders want the court to permanently enjoin the Illinois State Board of Elections from certifying petitions or conducting elections for the General Assembly under the Democrats' redistricting plan.

In addition, they asked the court to draw a map that complies with relevant laws and constitutional requirements or, in the alternative, to order the General Assembly to take corrective action.

"The Democrats passed a map this session that we believe is in direct violation of the Federal Voting Rights Act and some of our most basic rights under the Constitution," Cross said in a statement. "They should be ashamed of themselves. We are

optimistic that the court will agree with us and will help give our residents a fair map that accurately reflects our population, especially our growing Latino population."

Michael J. Kasper, one of the lawyers on the Democratic Party's legal team, said the party plans to respond to the lawsuit within 21 days, the deadline to respond under federal rules.

"We don't believe there is merit to the complaint," Kasper said.

Given the political nature of redistricting, the Republican's lawsuit was not much of a surprise. Redistricting is the decennial process of redrawing legislative boundaries to account for population changes following the federal census. It's common for this process to end in litigation as it is often used by the party in control to keep their members safe by drawing districts that make it easier for them to get elected.

Whatever map is put into place will determine who can run from where for the next decade. The Democrat-drawn map combines several districts into each, leaving several incumbent GOP members pitted against each other.

This is the GOP's second lawsuit in this year's redistricting process. The state party's chairman asked the Illinois Supreme Court in May to declare the state's tie-breaking provision unconstitutional. This provision is used when the General Assembly and the Legislative Redistricting Commission can't agree on a map.

The process hasn't gotten to that point this year as the General Assembly approved the map and Gov. Patrick J. Quinn signed it into law last month. The Illinois Supreme Court refused to hear the GOP's case.

And when it comes to the Republicans' federal lawsuit, Ann M. Lousin, a professor at The John Marshall Law School, said she wouldn't be surprised if the court refuses to hear the case or at least the arguments she believes belong in state court.

Lousin, who helped draft the 1970 Illinois Constitution and spent a few years working on the House Republican staff, said the GOP's claims over the Illinois Constitution, specifically that it requires districts to be compact, are not issues that the federal court can entertain.

While she's not sure how the federal court will act, Lousin said the Republicans' arguments over the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution (one person-one vote) and the Voting Rights Act, which intends to protect the voting power of minorities, are issues proper for federal review.

Some people, including Lousin, questioned why individual members of the black and Latino communities joined the lawsuit as plaintiffs, rather than the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF), a group dedicated to serving as the legal voice for the Latino community.

Elisa Alfonso, Midwest redistricting coordinator for MALDEF, said her group went on the record during this past legislative session as saying the Democrat-drawn map was bad because it did not properly represent Latinos.

She said MALDEF is in the process of reviewing the map to determine its next move. She said her group could decide to join the Republicans' lawsuit, file its own or do nothing.