



## Judge removes St. Louis County redistricting commissioner; two other vacancies filled

A St. Louis County judge on Monday ruled a Republican redistricting commissioner violated the county charter by refusing to resign his position on a local school board. Judge Thomas C. Albus ordered the removal of Curtis Faulkner from the county Bipartisan Reapportionment Commission for being in violation of a charter provision that commissioners “shall hold no other public office or employment.” The ruling granted Prosecuting Attorney Wesley Bell’s petition to have Faulkner barred from the redistricting panel. Bell filed the petition last week, arguing that if Faulkner remained on the commission, any maps the panel draws could get tossed out. Faulkner, a Republican representing the 4th District, also sits on the seven-member Board of Education of the Special School District of St. Louis County.

Unlike two other commission members, Faulkner had refused to step down, saying the charter provision didn’t apply to him. Both Amy Poelker, a Republican alderman from St. Ann, and Jean Pretto, a Democratic member of the Mehlville School Board, resigned from the commission after they were told about the charter language. Faulkner will be replaced on the commission by another Republican. The commission has 14 members: one Democrat and one Republican from each of the seven County Council districts. Redistricting is required every 10 years to try to make each district’s population as equal as possible. Voters in each district elect a representative to the County Council, the county’s legislative body. Faulkner’s attorney argued that the redistricting commission was not a public office and that the quo warrant petition was therefore “not the proper remedy,” to resolve the dispute, Albus said in his ruling. Albus disagreed.

“The commission to which respondent has been appointed is endowed with the power to establish districts in which members of the St. Louis County Council shall stand for election. This power seems to the Court to be at the very heart of the sovereign function of St. Louis County,” Albus wrote. Albus also said Faulkner’s attorney “conceded” that his school board position was a public office under the county charter. In public comments, Faulkner had argued the charter provision barring people holding a “public” office didn’t apply to him because he believes that word in this situation refers to elected officials. Faulkner was named to the school board seat by the district’s Governing Council, a 22-member panel consisting of one Board of Education member from 22 public school districts in the county. The council interviews and “elects” the seven members of the Special School District board. Faulkner, who serves a three-year term that ends in 2023, has been on the school board since 2018, representing the **Hazelwood** and Jennings school districts. In 2016, he was the Republican candidate for the 4th District on the County Council, but was defeated by Rochelle Walton Gray.