

Caucus seeking more black seats in La.

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BATON ROUGE — Members of the Louisiana Legislative Black Caucus say they want to expand the number of majority black seats in the Legislature and Congress, but it will be careful not to weaken existing districts.

At an all-day event Thursday at the Southern University Law Center, state and national figures involved in drawing election districts discussed laws af-

fecting redistricting and how the U.S. Department of Justice must approve any changes made in the state's current plan. Louisiana is one of 10 states governed by the Voting Rights Act because of past discriminatory voting laws and actions.

"We definitely want the number of minority districts to go up," said state Rep. Patricia Smith, D-Baton Rouge, the LLBC chair. "We're not sure how many" can be justified by census numbers, "but I'm pos-

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itive one more in Baton Rouge, possibly more."

Plans also are floating around that would create a second minority congressional district when lawmakers meet March 20 in special session to draw lines that comply with new U.S. Census population numbers.

Currently, the 2nd District, represented by Congressman Cedric Richmond of New Orleans, is the only congressional district in which black voters outnumber whites. Some law-

makers say adding a minority congressional district would be difficult while eliminating one congressman due to lack of population growth.

"Folks are not going to apportion themselves out of power, so I think it is good that the Justice Department reviews" the Legislature's decisions, said Baton Rouge resident Cleo Fields, a former state senator and congressman. Fields chaired the Senate committee that draws election lines.