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**HEADLINE:** City Council decides to restructure itself; Issue still in question is number of members

**BYLINE:** Gerard Shields

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**BODY:**

Baltimore City Council members agreed yesterday that it is time to restructure its 19-member legislative body but left open one important question: How many members should the council have?

The agreement came yesterday at a hearing of the Judiciary Committee. Over the past 50 years, the population of Baltimore has decreased by 250,000, resulting in calls to adjust the council's size.

Voters in each of the six council districts elect three members, and a council president is elected citywide.

The agreement to explore reducing the council came during discussion over a bill that proposes shrinking the body to six single-member districts plus a council president.

The League of Women Voters of Baltimore City testified that it would support the single-member district plan.

"Our support for a single-member district is based on the need for accountability," said President Millie Tyssowski. "The need to look to one individual to represent the district and be accountable for resolving problems that council persons should appropriately address."

Anthony J. Ambridge, the city's real estate officer who was a councilman for 13 years, submitted a bill three years ago to create single-member districts. He testified yesterday that reducing the council would empower it.

"I think it would be a more efficient and more effective body," Ambridge said.

But several council members said they oppose the single-member plan.

Committee Chairwoman Stephanie C. Rawlings of Northwest Baltimore worried that a single member would be unable to attend the dozens of community meetings in their districts each month that are now shared by three members.

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Councilman Robert W. Curran of Northeast Baltimore said reducing the membership to seven could cut into the council's diversity.

"I do believe the council needs to be right-sized," Curran said. "I don't believe single-member districts are the way to do it."

Several council members suggested waiting until after the 2000 census to determine best how the restructuring should occur.

Rawlings said she would hold hearings throughout the summer to explore the matter.

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