

INDEPENDENT GOVERNANCE AND REDISTRICTING REVIEW City of Lipscomb, Alabama January–December 2025

Introduction and Context

This report examines a series of administrative, legislative, and executive actions undertaken in the City of Lipscomb, Alabama, beginning in January 2025 and culminating in the suspension of effective city council governance in December 2025. The purpose of this review is to document, in detail, how an unlawful and unauthorized redistricting process was initiated, never lawfully adopted, later misrepresented to county election authorities, and ultimately relied upon by executive leadership to declare a quorum defect and halt the legislative operations of the city council.

This review does not purport to offer legal conclusions or judicial findings. Instead, it provides factual, procedural, and governance-based analysis intended to establish a clear record of events, decision-making authority, and institutional breakdowns for consideration by legal counsel, oversight bodies, or the public.

Initiation of Redistricting Without Legislative Authority

The redistricting effort at issue originated on January 22, 2025, when then-Mayor Tonya Baldwin initiated email communications with members of the Lipscomb City Council and Michael Miller regarding the possibility of redistricting the city's council districts. This initiation did not follow, and was not preceded by, any legislative action of the city council. At the time the emails were sent, the council had not adopted a resolution authorizing redistricting, had not directed staff to explore or prepare redistricting options, and had not approved the engagement of any individual, consultant, firm, or governmental body to perform redistricting work.

Equally important, the council had not requested that a resolution be drafted for the purpose of obtaining redistricting services, nor had it initiated any formal discussion regarding procurement, intergovernmental assistance, or collaboration with county or state entities. In short, there was no legislative predicate, formal or informal, for the redistricting effort to begin. The process was not initiated by council vote, council instruction, or council consent.

This absence of legislative authorization is not a technical oversight. Under Alabama municipal governance, redistricting is a core legislative function reserved to the city council. It is the council, not the mayor, that possesses the authority to determine whether redistricting is necessary, to define its scope, to select qualified assistance, and ultimately

to adopt or reject new district boundaries through ordinance or resolution. The mayor does not possess unilateral authority to initiate redistricting, commission maps, or advance redistricting proposals absent express council action.

Despite these constraints, the redistricting process began as an executive-driven initiative without any formal legislative foundation. January 22 communication effectively launched a redistricting effort outside the established governance structure, by passing the council's role as the body responsible for authorizing, supervising, and approving such work.

The individual who undertook the redistricting work, Michael Miller, further underscores the absence of lawful initiation. Miller was not a resident of the City of Lipscomb and therefore had no standing as a local citizen-expert. He was not a certified redistricting professional and was never presented to the council as a consultant or advisor. He did not submit a résumé, statement of qualifications, or scope of work. He was not vetted by the council, and no determination was made that he possessed the technical expertise or legal knowledge required for redistricting. His sole asserted qualification was that he was willing to assist.

Miller is employed as an administrative assistant to Jefferson County District 2 Commissioner Shelia Tyson. Commissioner Tyson later stated that she had no involvement in, and no knowledge of, the redistricting activity taking place in Lipscomb. Nevertheless, Miller's employment status is material because it intersects directly with questions of authority, perception, and institutional reliance.

Although Miller later claimed that he performed the redistricting work on his personal time and outside the scope of his county employment, the contemporaneous documentary record contradicts that assertion. All substantive communications regarding redistricting including correspondence with city officials, were transmitted using Miller's official Jefferson County email account, rather than a personal email address. The use of a government-issued email account is not incidental. It conveys apparent authority, signals institutional affiliation, and reasonably leads recipients to believe that the sender is acting in an official or semi-official capacity.

This distinction is critical because governmental entities, including county election authorities, do not rely on informal volunteers or private citizens when implementing changes that affect voter district assignments. Apparent authority matters. By communicating through official county channels, Miller was positioned, intentionally or not, as a legitimate governmental point of contact. This undermines any later characterization of the work as purely private, informal, or advisory and raises serious questions regarding agency, accountability, and the basis upon which county officials later treated the redistricting as legitimate.

In sum, the redistricting effort did not originate from lawful legislative action, was not authorized by the city council, and was carried out by an individual lacking both formal engagement and demonstrated qualifications, while operating under the appearance of county authority. These facts establish that the redistricting process was initiated outside the bounds of municipal governance and without the foundational authority required for any subsequent reliance or implementation.

February 18 Submissions and Procedural Deficiencies

On February 18, 2025, Michael Miller transmitted to members of the Lipscomb City Council two proposed district maps accompanied by limited population summaries. These materials were presented as a basis for potential redistricting of the city. However, when examined against professional, administrative, and legal standards commonly applied to municipal redistricting, the submissions were fundamentally and materially deficient. Municipal redistricting is a technical and legally sensitive process. At a minimum, it requires detailed census block-level data to ensure compliance with the constitutional requirement of substantially equal population across districts. It also requires deviation calculations demonstrating that population variances fall within permissible thresholds, along with documentation explaining how those calculations were performed. None of this information was provided. Without block-level data or in depth deviation analysis, the council had no way to assess whether the proposed districts met even the most basic population-equality requirements.

The materials also lacked contiguity and compactness evaluations; standard measures used to ensure that districts are geographically coherent and not arbitrarily drawn. No methodology was provided explaining why particular boundaries were selected, what criteria guided the line-drawing process, or how competing considerations were weighed. There were no statutory citations identifying the legal authority for the redistricting or explaining how the proposal aligned with Alabama law governing municipal elections and districting.

From the investigation, the proposed district maps were generated using Dave's Redistricting App, a publicly available, web-based redistricting application commonly used for exploratory, educational, journalistic, or advocacy purposes. The platform is designed to allow users to visualize potential districting scenarios, test hypothetical boundary configurations, and conduct preliminary analysis using publicly available census data.

Critically, Dave's Redistricting App is not a certified governmental redistricting system and is not intended to produce final, legally binding district maps for municipal adoption. It does not, by itself, establish compliance with Alabama municipal law, equal-population

requirements, or federal voting rights standards. When used without accompanying blocklevel data, deviation calculations, legal analysis, professional certification, or peer review, outputs generated by the platform remain conceptual and illustrative in nature.

Accordingly, the reliance on this application without any supporting documentation, validation by qualified professionals, or formal legislative process confirms that the submitted maps were preliminary, advisory drafts and were neither suitable nor defensible as a basis for formal redistricting by the City of Lipscomb.

Compounding these deficiencies was the complete absence of professional certification, peer review, or legal vetting. Miller did not present himself as a certified redistricting professional, did not provide credentials demonstrating expertise in election law or demographic analysis, and did not subject the proposed maps to review by legal counsel, planners, or election specialists. As a result, the materials could not reasonably be relied upon as a defensible basis for legislative action.

Despite these substantial shortcomings, Miller urged the council to approve the redistricting on the same day the materials were transmitted. This request was made even though no ordinance had been drafted, no public hearing had been scheduled, no legal review had been conducted, and no formal legislative process had been initiated. Sameday approval would have deprived council members of the opportunity to study the materials, seek expert input, or receive feedback from constituents.

Further undermining the legitimacy of the process was the fact that, according to thenMayor Baldwin, Miller would not be able to consult with the council in person. As a result, he could not appear before the council in an open meeting to explain his methodology, answer questions, or respond to concerns raised by council members or the public. This limitation effectively denied both the council and the citizens of Lipscomb the transparency and public engagement that customarily accompany redistricting decisions.

Open discussion in a public council meeting is a central feature of lawful redistricting. It allows elected officials to question assumptions, test conclusions, and hear from residents whose representation may be affected. By advancing a proposal that could not be publicly presented, scrutinized, or debated, the process departed sharply from accepted norms of municipal governance.

Taking together, the February 18 submissions did not constitute a redistricting plan capable of lawful adoption. They lacked the data, analysis, transparency, and procedural foundation required for legislative action. At most, they represented an informal and exploratory exercise. Any effort to treat these materials as operative or authoritative disregards both the substantive deficiencies of the submissions and the procedural safeguards that govern redistricting at the municipal level.

Removal of Redistricting from the Council Agenda

Following February 18, 2025, email transmission between Michael Miller, the mayor, and members of the city council, Mayor Tonya Baldwin drafted a proposed resolution related to redistricting for placement on the agenda of the next scheduled council meeting. The drafting of the resolution demonstrates that the mayor understood that redistricting, if it were to occur at all, required formal legislative action by the council and could not be implemented informally or administratively.

However, prior to the council meeting, Mayor Baldwin removed the proposed redistricting resolution from the agenda. This decision occurred after the deficiencies in the redistricting materials were apparent, including the lack of professional analysis, the absence of a scope of work, and the absence of any demonstrated legal or procedural compliance. The removal was not the result of a council vote, a public objection, or a procedural defect in meeting notice. It was an executive decision to withdraw the item from consideration.

The significance of this action cannot be overstated. By removing the item from the agenda, the mayor ensured that the council would not debate, consider, or vote on redistricting. No ordinance was introduced. No resolution was presented. No motion was made. As a result, the legislative body took no action approving, adopting, or ratifying any redistricting proposal. The absence of a vote was not accidental or the product of inaction by the council; it was the direct and foreseeable consequence of the agenda removal.

In municipal governance, the agenda controls what the legislative body is permitted to consider. When an item is removed, the legislative process is halted entirely. The council cannot adopt what it is not allowed to take up. Thus, the removal of the redistricting item functioned as a procedural stop, conclusively preventing redistricting from advancing through lawful channels at that time.

The removal also reflects the mayor's awareness that the redistricting process lacked procedural readiness and legislative viability. Had the mayor believed that redistricting was lawful, complete, and defensible, the proper course would have been to present the resolution for council consideration and allow the legislative body to act. Instead, the decision to withdraw the item avoided a vote that would have either formally rejected the proposal or exposed its deficiencies on the public record.

From a governance perspective, this moment fixed the legal status of redistricting. Once the item was removed and no subsequent ordinance or resolution was introduced, the city remained governed by its existing district boundaries. There was no pending redistricting action, no provisional approval, and no legislative ambiguity. The council had not failed to act; it had been procedurally prevented from acting.

This point is critical because later actions by executive officials and county authorities implicitly treated redistricting as if it had been adopted or approved. The agenda removal forecloses that interpretation. The mayor's own conduct confirms that no lawful redistricting existed. From the moment the resolution was removed, and until the council's later formal rejection through Resolution 2025-15, there was no ordinance, resolution, or legislative act authorizing redistricting in the City of Lipscomb.

Accordingly, any subsequent reliance on the February redistricting materials as operative law ignores the decisive procedural fact that the mayor herself prevented the council from considering and adopting them. The removal of the item from the agenda marks the point at which redistricting definitively ceased to exist as a lawful legislative possibility and underscores that all later claims of redistricting were detached from municipal process and authority.

Council's Formal Rejection of Redistricting

On May 20, 2025, the Lipscomb City Council took definitive legislative action on the issue. The council adopted Resolution 2025-15, which expressly declined to redistrict and affirmed the continuation of the city's existing council district boundaries. This resolution is the last and only lawful council action addressing redistricting during the relevant period. It was never rescinded, amended, or overturned. It represents controlling legislative determination of the governing body.

Election Administration and the Role of the Municipal Election Officer

In 2025, Ramona Banks served as the duly designated Municipal Election Officer for the City of Lipscomb. In that official capacity, she was responsible for overseeing the administrative integrity of the city's municipal election process, including coordinating candidate qualifications, serving as the primary liaison between the city and Jefferson County election officials, and administering the August 26, 2025, municipal election in accordance with state law and established election procedures.

Banks' responsibilities placed her at the center of the lawful election administration process. She was the official charged with collecting and certifying candidate qualification materials, transmitting accurate district and residency information to Jefferson County, reviewing ballots prepared by the county for consistency with municipal records, and addressing any discrepancies or issues that arose before or during Election Day. Her role required strict adherence to the actions of the city council, as only the council possesses legislative authority to alter district boundaries.

Banks was fully aware that a redistricting proposal had been presented earlier in the year.

She was also aware that the proposal had not advanced through the legislative process. The city council had tabled the proposal and, on May 20, 2025, had formally rejected redistricting through the adoption of Resolution 2025-15. Banks reviewed and understood that resolution and recognized it as the controlling legislative directive governing district boundaries for the 2025 election cycle.

Based on this understanding, Banks proceeded exactly as required. She collected candidate qualification information from individuals seeking office and verified that information against the existing district boundaries in which incumbents had historically served. At no point did she receive notice of a lawful change in district boundaries, nor did she receive any ordinance, certified resolution, or directive indicating that redistricting had been adopted or implemented.

Banks then transmitted the candidate qualification information to Jefferson County election officials, reflecting the existing council districts. Jefferson County used that information to prepare and generate the official ballots for the August 26, 2025, election. Upon receiving the ballots prepared by the county, Banks reviewed them and found that they appeared consistent with the district information she had submitted. Nothing in the ballot materials suggested that district boundaries had been altered or that redistricting had been implemented.

The municipal election proceeded on August 26, 2025, under the assumptions shared by Banks, the candidates, and the city that the existing district boundaries governed the election. During voting, however, Banks began receiving complaints from voters who reported being issued ballots reflecting districts different from those in which they had previously voted in prior municipal elections. These complaints were unexpected and inconsistent with both the candidate qualification records, and the ballots Banks had reviewed prior to Election Day.

The emergence of these complaints marked the first indication that voter district assignments may have been altered at the county level without the knowledge or authorization of the municipal election officer. At that point, Banks had complied with every procedural requirement placed upon her role and had relied in good faith on the city council's legislative action rejecting redistricting. The discrepancy observed on Election Day therefore did not arise from municipal election administration, but from an external change that had not been communicated through lawful or customary channels.

Discovery of County-Level District Changes and Breakdown of Lawful Election Administration

As August 26, 2025, municipal election unfolded, Municipal Election Officer Romon Banks began receiving complaints from voters who reported being issued ballots reflecting districts different from those in which they had historically voted. These complaints were not isolated or speculative; they came directly from voters at polling locations who were familiar with their districts and immediately recognized discrepancies.

Acting within her official role and consistent with standard election administration practice, Banks contacted Jefferson County election officials to determine whether a clerical or technical error had occurred. On election day, she spoke directly with Barry Stephenson, Chair of the Jefferson County Board of Registrars. During that initial conversation, Stephenson advised Banks that voters were being issued ballots for their correct districts. At that point, there was no indication from the county that any redistricting had been implemented or that district boundaries had changed.

The following day, however, Stephenson contacted Banks again with materially different information. During this subsequent communication, he informed her that the City of Lipscomb had been redistricted and that the request for redistricting had come from City Hall. This disclosure was the first time Banks, who had served as the municipal election officer throughout the qualification, ballot preparation, and election process, were made aware that any redistricting had been recognized or implemented at the county level.

This moment is pivotal. Banks had submitted candidate qualification information to Jefferson County reflecting existing district boundaries, consistent with the council's formal rejection of redistricting and the absence of any redistricting ordinance. Jefferson County had generated ballots based on that information. At no point prior to election day had Banks been notified of a change in district boundaries, nor had she received any documentation indicating that the city had lawfully redistricted.

Mayor Tonya Baldwin and the city magistrate were present when Stephenson disclosed that the county believed Lipscomb had been redistricted at the city's request. Their presence is significant, as it establishes that the city's highest executive official was contemporaneously aware that county election systems had been altered based on an asserted city action that, in fact, had never occurred lawfully.

Approximately fifteen minutes after this disclosure, Michael Miller contacted Mayor Baldwin by phone. During that call, Miller asked who Romon Banks was and why she had contacted Stephenson regarding the election. Miller stated that Stephenson had just contacted him. This exchange is critically important to understanding how county-level changes were implemented.

If Miller had truly acted independently, informally, and without authority, as he later claimed, there would have been no institutional basis for the Chair of the Board of Registrars to contact him regarding municipal redistricting. County election officials do not coordinate district changes with private citizens or informal volunteers. The fact that

Stephenson contacted Miller directly indicates that Miller was perceived by county officials as a legitimate point of contact for the City of Lipscomb on redistricting matters. That perception could only have arisen from representations made to the county, either explicitly or implicitly, that Miller was acting with authority on behalf of the city.

During the same call, Miller asked Mayor Baldwin whether the city council had passed a resolution adopting the redistricting. Baldwin responded that she “must have forgotten.” This response is irreconcilable with the known facts. The council had not passed a redistricting ordinance or resolution. To the contrary, it had formally voted not to redistrict. Moreover, Stephenson had already stated that the city itself requested redistricting. If no resolution existed, and if Baldwin knew that no legislative action had occurred, the question becomes unavoidable: who, acting on behalf of the city, communicated to Jefferson County that redistricting had been approved?

The absence of a lawful ordinance is not technical oversight; it is a fundamental defect. County election authorities rely on formal municipal action, typically an ordinance or certified resolution, to alter district boundaries in voter registration systems. In this instance, district assignments within the county’s voter system were changed without such documentation, resulting in voters being issued ballots inconsistent with the districts in which candidates were qualified and historically served.

Equally troubling is the uneven impact of these changes. Not all voters were reassigned to different districts. Some voters continued to vote in their historical districts, while others were redirected based on altered county records. This inconsistency underscores that the changes were administrative in nature and not the result of a comprehensive, lawfully adopted redistricting plan.

In sum, the discovery of county-level district changes revealed a complete breakdown in the lawful chain of authority. Redistricting was neither adopted by the city council nor communicated through proper legal channels. Nevertheless, Jefferson County altered voter district assignments based on representations attributed to City Hall, with Michael Miller functioning as an apparent intermediary. This breakdown set in motion a series of election irregularities and governance disputes that would later be exploited to challenge council membership and manufacture a quorum crisis.

Post-Election Litigation and Selective Enforcement

By October 13, 2025, former Mayor Tonya Baldwin possessed full knowledge that no lawful redistricting ordinance had been adopted by the Lipscomb City Council. The council had neither approved nor enacted new district boundaries, and Resolution 2025-15, formally rejecting redistricting, remained in effect. Despite this, Baldwin initiated litigation in circuit court challenging the residency of sitting council members based exclusively on the purported redistricting.

This action did not arise from a judicial determination that redistricting had occurred, nor from a legislative act conferring new district boundaries. Instead, it rested entirely on the premise that unauthorized and procedurally defective redistricting could be treated as operative law. In effect, the lawsuit attempted to achieve through judicial process what had not been accomplished through legislative action: the alteration of council composition.

The structure of the lawsuit is as significant as its filing. Baldwin challenged the residency of only two council members, despite the fact that, under the same purported redistricting maps, a third council member would also have been affected. That third council member was not named as a defendant. The omission was not explained by legal distinction, factual difference, or timing. Rather, the excluded council member was a known Baldwin supporter whose continued presence on the council would have preserved political alignment favorable to Baldwin's interests.

Such selective enforcement materially undermines any claim that the litigation was motivated by neutral concerns regarding compliance with election law or residency requirements. If the objective had been to ensure lawful governance, all similarly situated council members would have been treated consistently. Instead, the litigation was narrowly tailored in a manner that would, if successful, remove political opponents while leaving allies undisturbed. This selectivity transforms the lawsuit from a compliance mechanism into a strategic instrument with direct governance consequences.

The venue in which the suit was filed further compounds the governance implications. The case was assigned to a court presided over by a judge with prior professional ties to the City of Lipscomb and to Baldwin herself. While this report does not assert judicial bias or impropriety, the institutional overlap is not immaterial. In small municipalities, prior professional relationships can significantly affect public confidence in the neutrality of proceedings, particularly where the litigation seeks to alter the composition of an elected legislative body.

The practical effect of the lawsuit was not to clarify the legality of redistricting, but to perpetuate uncertainty. Rather than resolving the underlying issue; whether any redistricting had been lawfully adopted. The litigation presupposed the existence of valid district boundaries and sought to remove selected council members on that basis. This approach inverted the proper order of governance review, substituting litigation strategy for legislative process and judicial determination on the merits of redistricting itself.

When viewed in context, the October 13 lawsuit represents a critical escalation. It marked the first formal attempt to weaponize the unlawful redistricting against specific council members, setting a precedent for later executive actions that would rely on the same invalid premise to declare a quorum defect and suspend council operations altogether. The

selective nature of the litigation, combined with its timing and scope, underscores its role as a precursor to the broader governance breakdown that followed.

Mayor Sims' Prior Acknowledgment of Redistricting Invalidity

Following the August 2025 municipal election and the subsequent litigation initiated by former Mayor Tonya Baldwin, Rob Sims assumed office as mayor of the City of Lipscomb. At the time he took office, the redistricting controversy was not a latent or technical issue; it was an active and widely discussed matter that had already resulted in election irregularities, litigation challenging council residency, and public concern regarding the integrity of municipal governance. Sims entered office with full awareness that the legitimacy of the purported redistricting was disputed and unresolved.

On November 24, 2025, during a recorded planning session attended by city leadership, Sims made a clear and unambiguous statement that he would support the city council in securing legal representation to challenge the redistricting. This statement was not casual or speculative. It was made in the context of ongoing governance discussions and reflected an understanding that the redistricting process was fundamentally flawed. By offering support for litigation against the redistricting, Sims implicitly acknowledged that the process lacked legal foundation and could not be defended as a lawful legislative act of the council.

Importantly, this acknowledgment was not limited to procedural technicalities. Sims' statement reflected an appreciation of the broader institutional implications of the redistricting, including its effect on council composition, election administration, and public confidence. At that time, Sims aligned himself with the council's position that the redistricting had not been lawfully adopted and that its consequences, both electoral and governmental, required correction through proper legal channels.

This acknowledgment is critical for purposes of governance analysis because it establishes that Sims' later reliance on the same redistricting was not the result of ignorance, misunderstanding, or newly discovered facts. He was not misled as to the status of the redistricting, nor was he operating under the assumption that a valid ordinance existed. To the contrary, his own recorded statements demonstrate contemporaneous knowledge that the redistricting was invalid or, at minimum, so procedurally defective that it warranted affirmative legal challenge.

The significance of this prior acknowledgment cannot be overstated. When an executive official later asserts authority based on a legal condition he previously recognized as unlawful, the issue is no longer one of error or uncertainty, but of conscious reversal. Sims' December actions: declaring council members disqualified, asserting a quorum failure,

and seeking judicial intervention, were taken against the backdrop of his earlier recognition that the redistricting had no lawful foundation. This sequence forecloses any claim that his later position was adopted in good-faith reliance on a valid legislative act.

In practical terms, Sims' November 24 statement establishes a baseline of knowledge. It fixes a point in time at which the mayor understood that redistricting could not be used to determine council residency or quorum. Any subsequent invocation of that redistricting, therefore, must be understood as a strategic choice rather than a good-faith mistake. This prior acknowledgment forms a critical link in the chain of events leading to the manufactured quorum crisis and the suspension of legislative governance in December.

Reversal and Manufactured Quorum Crisis

The relationship between Mayor Rob Sims and the Lipscomb City Council deteriorated not gradually, but sharply and in direct response to the council's renewed assertion of its legislative authority. After initially cooperating with the council and acknowledging that the purported redistricting was unlawful, tensions escalated when the council moved to reestablish its oversight role. The council began taking steps to revoke executive powers that had been temporarily delegated to the mayor during an earlier period of instability, to impose a hiring freeze in response to administrative concerns, and to address unresolved appointments involving the police chief and the city attorney—positions that fall squarely within the council's statutory oversight responsibilities.

These actions represented a meaningful rebalancing of authority. They were not symbolic measures, but concrete exercises of legislative power that would have constrained the mayor's discretion over personnel, contracts, and administrative control. It was against this backdrop, rather than against any newly discovered legal defect, that Mayor Sims reversed his prior position on the redistricting issue.

On December 8, 2025, Sims issued a formal written notice asserting that, upon review of district maps, three sitting council members no longer resided within their respective districts and that the council therefore lacked a lawful quorum. He further declared that all council actions taken under those circumstances were legally defective and subject to invalidation.

This declaration did not rest on new evidence, newly adopted law, or a judicial ruling. It relied entirely on the same redistricting process that Sims had previously acknowledged was unlawful and had supported challenging in court. No ordinance passed. No council resolution had adopted new district boundaries. The controlling legislative act, Resolution 2025-15 rejecting redistricting, remained in full force. The factual predicate for Sims'

declaration was therefore not only disputed but grounded in an action that the council had expressly declined to take.

Equally important is the timing of the declaration. A duly noticed city council meeting was scheduled for December 9, less than twenty-four hours after Sims' notice was issued. The agenda for that meeting included actions that would have directly and immediately affected the mayor's authority, including the revocation of executive powers, enforcement of the hiring freeze, and further action regarding senior appointments. Had the meeting occurred, the council would have exercised its legislative powers in full view of the public and on record.

The December 8 declaration had the immediate and foreseeable effect of preventing that meeting from taking place. By asserting that the council lacked a quorum, Sims effectively nullified the body's ability to assemble, deliberate, or vote. The declaration did not merely raise a legal question for later resolution; it operated as a functional veto of the council's ability to act at a critical moment.

Council President Pro Tem Monique Wilkerson responded promptly and in her official capacity. In her written response, she made clear that the mayor does not possess legal authority to declare council members disqualified, that quorum is determined by law and fact, not by executive proclamation and that the council's composition cannot be altered in lawful redistricting or judicial determination. She reaffirmed that Resolution 2025-15 remained the controlling legislative action and warned that the mayor's unilateral declaration created significant legal risk and institutional disorder for the city.

Despite this warning, the effect of Sims' action was not temporary uncertainty but immediate paralysis. The council was prevented from meeting. Legislative oversight was suspended. The balance of power shifted entirely to the executive branch and not through voter action, council vote, or court adjudication on the merits, but through reliance on invalid redistricting and a unilateral declaration timed to stop the council from acting.

When viewed in sequence, the December 8 declaration cannot be understood as a neutral effort to ensure compliance with election law. It was a preemptive maneuver deployed at the precise moment when the council was prepared to curtail executive authority. The quorum crisis did not arise organically from lawful redistricting or unavoidable ambiguity. It was manufactured through the selective resurrection of an unlawful process that had previously been acknowledged as invalid and rejected by the council itself.

TRO and Suspension of Legislative Governance

On December 9, 2025, Mayor Sims sought and obtained an emergency temporary restraining order without hearing. No external emergency existed. The only imminent event was the scheduled council meeting.

The practical effect of the TRO was to halt council operations entirely. Since that date, the City of Lipscomb has operated without a functioning city council, with the mayor exercising authority without legislative oversight, including in matters of finance and personnel.

Governance Impact and Conclusion

The cumulative record does more than establish a series of procedural failures; it reveals a clear sequence in which an unlawful redistricting was later repurposed as a mechanism to suspend legislative governance at a moment when the city council was poised to act. When viewed in full, the evidence supports the conclusion that the December 9 temporary restraining order was not sought to resolve uncertainty or preserve the status quo, but to prevent the existence of a lawful quorum and to preempt the exercise of council authority.

By the time Mayor Rob Sims issued his December 8 notice asserting that the council lacked a lawful quorum, he was not discovering a new defect. He was acting with prior, direct knowledge that the redistricting on which his declaration relied had never been lawfully adopted. This knowledge is established by his own recorded statements weeks earlier, in which he acknowledged the redistricting was invalid and expressed support for the council's efforts to challenge it. The legal theory advanced on December 8 therefore did not arise from newly uncovered facts, but from a deliberate reversal of position timed to coincide with a scheduled council meeting.

That timing is not incidental. A duly noticed council meeting was arranged for the evening of December 9. The agenda included matters that would have materially constrained the mayor's authority, including the revocation of previously delegated executive powers, enforcement of a hiring freeze, and formal action regarding senior appointments. Absent intervention, the council would have possessed both the quorum and the statutory authority to act.

The December 8 declaration and the December 9 emergency TRO had the immediate and predictable effect of preventing that meeting from occurring. No external emergency existed. There was no newly announced election, no impending deadline imposed by state or federal law, and no intervening judicial ruling requiring immediate restraint. The sole imminent event was the council's scheduled exercise of its legislative powers. The TRO

functioned not as a neutral pause, but as an instrument that ensured the council could not assemble, deliberate, or vote.

Equally significant is what the TRO did not do. It did not resolve the legality of the redistricting. It did not adjudicate residency. It did not determine council qualifications on the merits. Instead, it froze governance at the precise moment when the legislative body would have acted, leaving the mayor as the only functioning authority. In effect, the order substituted executive assertion for legislative process and judicial determination for municipal governance, without first establishing that the council was unlawfully constituted.

The record therefore supports a finding that the quorum crisis in Lipscomb was not the product of lawful redistricting or unavoidable legal ambiguity. It was manufactured through reliance on an act known to be invalid, deployed selectively, and timed to stop the council from exercising oversight. The resulting paralysis of the legislative branch was not incidental; it was the foreseeable and intended consequence of the sequence of actions taken.

Since December 9, the City of Lipscomb has operated without a functioning city council, not because the council was lawfully dissolved or disqualified, but because its ability to meet was preempted. The mayor's continued exercise of authority without legislative oversight flows directly from that interruption. This concentration of executive power did not arise organically from statute or court judgment on the merits, but from the strategic use of an unlawful redistricting and an emergency court filing to eliminate quorum at a critical moment.

Viewed as a whole, the events documented in this report demonstrate a breakdown not merely of procedure, but of institutional balance. The separation between legislative authority and executive power was disrupted, not by lawful redistricting or voter mandate, but by a calculated sequence of administrative actions that culminated in the suspension of representative governance.

Final Observations and Institutional Consequences

What occurred in the City of Lipscomb between January and December 2025 was not a misunderstanding of process, nor a good-faith dispute over technical compliance. It was the systematic erosion of legislative authority through the misuse of an act that never lawfully existed. The record assembled in this report establishes, step by step, that redistricting was never authorized, never adopted, never ratified, and never cured. Yet it was repeatedly treated as real; first administratively, then judicially, and finally executively

until it achieved the practical effect of suspending representative government. At no point did the Lipscomb City Council vote to redistrict. At no point did the public receive notice or an opportunity to be heard. At no point did a lawful ordinance or resolution alter district boundaries. And at no point did a court adjudicate the redistricting as valid on the merits. These facts are not disputed by the record; they are confirmed by it.

Nevertheless, an invalid process was allowed to take on operative force. It was used to alter voter assignments, to challenge the residency of selected council members, to declare a quorum failure, and ultimately to justify emergency judicial intervention. Each step depended on treating unlawful redistricting as if it were law. Each step compounded the consequences of the one before it.

Most troubling is the manner in which this progression culminated. The December 9 temporary restraining order did not preserve democratic stability; it extinguished it. It did not resolve uncertainty; it froze governance. It did not protect the public interest; it removed the public's elected legislative body from operation at the precise moment it was prepared to act. The mayor was left as the sole functioning authority not because voters removed the council, not because the council resigned, and not because a court found the council unlawfully constituted but because the council was prevented from meeting.

This distinction matters. Democracies do not fail only through elections; they fail through procedure. They fail when legislative bodies are neutralized without a vote. They fail when emergency mechanisms are invoked absent emergency conditions. They fail when unlawful acts are repeatedly relied upon until they become functionally real. And they fail when the separation of powers collapses not by force, but by sequence.

The events in Lipscomb reveal how fragile local governance can be when procedural safeguards are disregarded. A city council can be rendered inert without ever being dissolved. Oversight can vanish without repeal. Authority can concentrate without authorization. And once legislative paralysis sets in, every subsequent action; budgetary, administrative, contractual occurs in a vacuum of accountability.

This report does not ask the reader to accept conclusions; it asks the reader to follow the facts. Those facts show that the quorum crisis was not discovered, it was constructed. The emergency was not external, it was manufactured. And the suspension of legislative governance was not inevitable; it was the foreseeable result of choices made with full knowledge of their consequences.

What remains now is not merely a legal question, but an institutional one. If a city council can be sidelined through reliance on an act that never became law, then the protection of representative government is only as strong as the willingness to enforce process.

Lipscomb's experience stands as a warning: when procedure is treated as optional, power fills the void.

The ultimate judgment of these events will rest with courts, oversight bodies, and the public. But the record is now clear. This was not a failure of democracy by accident. It was a failure by design, sequence, and tolerance. And until that reality is confronted, the risk it poses extends far beyond one city, one council, or one year.