

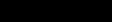
  

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Regarding: Congressional

Message:

Testimony on the Revised Congressional Redistricting Plan

Good afternoon, Senate Redistricting Committee members. Thank you for holding this legislative hearing today.

My name is Jerome Wald. I am a native of Houston, where I still reside. I am also a retired, Texas state employee. Now 75 years old, I have been involved with politics since I was 14. And I am a proud constituent of Texas Congressional District 7.

As a Texan, I wish the Senate was working on redistricting fairness rather than scheming how to gerrymander congressional districts. Instead, I am here to testify against the harmful attempt to redraw Texas districts prior to the middle of the decade.

The communities with which I most closely identify include my extended family, my congregation, and the Labor movement. When trouble strikes, we support each other. I should share a member of Congress with them, not with a random neighborhood outside of Harris County.

Texas has a long history of discriminating against communities of color when drawing new maps. Harris County has seen their districts cracked, stacked, or packed for decades. I am concerned that the same thing will happen under another revised redistricting plan.

These hearings should take months or several weeks instead of being squeezed into only five days. Spending insufficient time to redraw Congressional district lines smacks of bias at best and is underhanded at worst.

There are seven significant points about the revised plan I want to address as follows:

1. In a public hearing that includes taking testimony, voters and the public should be shown proposed maps after being drawn, but before they are voted on.
2. Do not discriminate against voters of color. That is blatant racism and illegal. The one-seat advantage that Republicans have in the Texas House of Representatives is so scary for current office holders because it shows what a tenuous influence Republicans have in the House.
3. Do not limit public testimony to five (5) hours. All our voices deserve to be heard. People have taken time away from work and their families so that they can address their representatives.

4. We Need at Least 5 Days to Review the Maps.

Maps must be made available to the public at least five days in advance of any public hearings during a special session or other votes being taken - to allow sufficient time for the public to review the maps, prepare testimony, and propose alternative maps.

5. We Also Need at Least 5 Days to Review Any Proposed Changes in the Maps.

Any amendments (i.e. changes) offered to a map proposal must be presented at least five days in advance of any vote to allow the public to analyze the proposed amendments and advocate for or against them.

6. Legislators Should Provide an Analysis of How the New Maps Impact Historically Disenfranchised Communities.

The bill analysis for any map proposal must include how the proposed map affects communities of color and VRA-protected language minorities.

7. Keep All Documents, Written Communications, Emails, Text Messages and Draft Maps.

We expect the entire process — from beginning to end — to be fully transparent to the public with full disclosure of every aspect of the Legislature's work: data, communications, consultations or proposals, from whatever source. Claims of 'legislative privilege' have no place when it comes to redistricting.

In closing, I urge legislators to follow what's commonly known as the Golden Rule:

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

[Versions of the rule are found in the Jewish Talmud and the Old Testament Leviticus 19:18.]

Submitted by Jerome S. Wald, MPH

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Houston, Texas

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