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Affirm public info: I agree

Regarding: Congressional

Message:

I submit this testimony on behalf of myself and Emgage Action, a 501(c)(4) organization committed to building civic power and strengthening our pluralistic democracy. Like Texans across the state, I strongly oppose this attempt to redraw congressional maps mid-decade without transparency or public accountability.

Special sessions are for addressing urgent issues and challenges in Texas, such as disaster recovery and relief efforts for the Texans devastated by the Central Texas floods. Redistricting now, in this manner, is not an urgent matter. Our current maps have been the subject of a pending lawsuit over racial gerrymandering claims since 2021. The lawsuit has proceeded slowly partly because of an unwillingness on the legislature's part to provide records and other evidence. Rather than let the current litigation play out, the legislature is attempting to redistrict again directly before a verdict.

Furthermore, there is no legal requirement and no new Census data that justifies this redistricting. Data on Texans available now is the same as the Census data available in 2021 and 2023, when the current maps were confirmed. At that time, it was well known that 95% of Texas's population growth was driven by people of color, growth significant enough to secure Texas two additional congressional seats. Yet, the maps failed to reflect or represent these communities fairly; the maps instead increased the number of majority-Anglo districts in our congressional maps. Proposed maps that better reflected the demographic makeup of the state and that kept communities of interest together were provided to legislators and were rejected. While going through the process, legislators such as Committee Chair Senator Joan Huffman repeatedly claimed that the maps were "race-blind" in public and on the record in a consolidated lawsuit.

In sum, the redistricting committees and the legislature at large have twice approved our existing maps. They have already had the opportunity to treat voters of color and communities of interest fairly, and declined to do so. They should not be revisiting our maps now in a rushed and flawed process mid-decade to implement new lines close to the 2026 primary elections.

Those new lines are currently unknown to Texans, because neither this committee nor its House counterpart has made proposed maps available to the public. A fair process would allow the public ample time to review proposed maps and hearings to comment on those maps. If this

committee is determine to proceed with redistricting, then I request commitment to the following procedures and requirements:

- 1) Holding public hearings, both virtual and in-person in affected districts, after the maps have been drawn but before they are voted on by the committee.
- 2) Allowing the public a minimum of 5 days to access and review the maps before this hearing.
- 3) The legislators and others who draw the maps should publicly explain why they chose to draw the district boundaries the way they did.
- 4) The redistricting committees and others involved in drawing the maps and setting up the redistricting process should make any communications they have had regarding drawing the maps and structuring the process publicly available.

While I appreciate the opportunity to comment to the committee, these hearings were announced with short notice and without maps available. This committee could also have expanded access by having both virtual and in-person hearings.

Having a process where Texans have a voice in our maps is important not only for the sake of process, but for the end outcome: representative maps. Currently, over 60% of Texas is non-Anglo. Our congressional delegation, however, is over 65% Anglo. Representation, avoiding racial gerrymandering, and having fair maps impacts what communities are valued and what policies are passed. The failure of our current congressional delegation to truly represent Texans is evident in the recent tax cut legislation that the majority of our delegation voted for. Polling, including from the Texas Politics Project, shows that most Texans do not support the bill's provisions, especially the cuts to Medicaid, the ACA, and SNAP. Our delegation voted for these cuts anyway. It's also worth noting that two of the districts that will likely be targeted for redistricting, TX-18 and TX-29, have some of the highest numbers of Texans who rely on these programs that our congressional delegation helped cut. Redistricting now, in a manner that targets communities of color, will make our delegation even less representative than it already is.

This committee holds the power to determine how much Texans' votes count. That power requires responsibility, transparency, and public accountability. This current process involves none of those. Texans deserve legislators and maps that respond to and represent voters. This committee can provide Texans what we deserve by declining to redraw maps now.

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