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Sent: Wednesday, November 25, 2020 2:19 PM
To: Senate Redistricting
Subject: INETMAIL: Redistricting Public Input

Date: 2020-11-25

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Address: [REDACTED]

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Affirm public info: I agree

Regarding: Census

Message:

Texas has been found in violation of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 because of intentional racial discrimination every decade since its enactment. State lawmakers, who largely control the drawing of new district lines, have been challenged in court each decade for intentionally weakening the political power of voters of color by packing them into select districts, or splitting them across several districts — a practice commonly known as racial gerrymandering.

The most recent redistricting plan in 2010, drawn by a Republican-dominated Texas Legislature, set off a decade-long legal struggle of 10 separate court rulings of intentional racial discrimination against Black and Latinx voters.

Legal challenges to gerrymandered maps were facilitated by a federal oversight measure in the Voting Rights Act known as “preclearance,” which forced states with a history of discrimination, like Texas, to get new district maps and voting right laws cleared by the U.S. Department of Justice or a federal court before going into effect. Preclearance proved, for decades, to safeguard against the most egregious violations of disenfranchisement of voters of color. In 2013, however, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the preclearance law in *Shelby v. Holder*, giving Texas a new unchecked power in creating voting laws and passing redistricting plans.

In an effort to remedy urgent concerns about the lack of preclearance and increase transparency in the upcoming 2020 redistricting process, Texas lawmakers planned for a series of public input hearings earlier this year, led by the House and Senate Redistricting Committees. Both committees are led by Republicans, Rep. Phil King and Sen. Joan Huffman, respectively.

The House and Senate originally planned for a limited public hearing schedule, however, the Texas Civil Rights Project built a coalition of groups to successfully agitate for the geographic expansion of these public hearings to reach across every corner of the state, from Austin and Houston to Amarillo and Weslaco. Then, COVID-19 swept across the state.

Because state leadership prematurely opened the state and failed to enact safety measures to control the pandemic, COVID-19 cases have skyrocketed to nearly 600,000 infections and have claimed nearly 11,000 lives, disproportionately

killing Black and Latinx Texans. South Texas communities along the U.S.-Mexico border have the highest infection rates across the entire nation.

Due to the pandemic, public hearings for redistricting were indefinitely postponed in March. However, in the past four months since, the legislature has failed to provide a plan to resume the hearings with a modified schedule or different format.

