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Sent: Friday, January 8, 2021 11:11 AM
To: Senate Redistricting
Subject: INETMAIL: Redistricting Public Input

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Regarding: ALL

Message:

Political maps are the foundation of who does and does not have a voice in a democracy. If you are drawn into a district where you are in the political minority — whether that's because of race, political party or geography — the chance that your point of view will be considered is diminished. It can remain that way for another decade, until another census forces a new redrawing of those political districts.

In every decade since the federal Voting Rights Act was passed, federal courts have found that Texas lawmakers disenfranchised voters in one way or another when drawing maps. Because of this long history of voter suppression, Texas was required for decades to run any changes to its elections, including changes to district boundaries, by the U.S. Department of Justice or a federal court.

But in 2013, the Supreme Court gutted the Voting Rights Act and ruled that the formula that kept states like Texas under federal oversight was outdated, freeing the state from the process known as preclearance. That means the 2021 redistricting cycle may mark the first time in nearly 50 years that Texas will be able to implement new legislative and congressional districts without having to prove ahead of time that the maps do not undermine the electoral power of voters of color.

The people elected in those districts are the ones who draw the maps, which means the process starts with a built-in conflict of interest. In redistricting, lawmakers are not only fighting over voters' rights and fair representation — but also for their own political survival. Oftentimes, rather than working together to draw district maps fairly, representatives focus on moving lines to protect themselves, stay in office and put their enemies at a disadvantage — an act called gerrymandering.

For the past decade, the state of Texas has been dealing with the legal implications of the 2011 redistricting maps that ended up being rejected by the federal government. Following explosive population growth in Texas, particularly among Hispanic residents, the state gained four seats in Congress that cycle. Rather than creating a district with a Black and Hispanic majority that could have made their seats safer in a Democratic wave election,

Republicans opted for keeping their numbers up in Dallas County and purposefully diluted the voting strength of voters of color in the Texas House map and in several congressional districts.

This sparked temporary and replacement maps that were also found discriminatory in some ways.

Redistricting expert Michael Li says the upcoming maps could prevent the Legislature and the congressional delegation from reflecting the population of Texas.

The Legislative Redistricting Board (LRD), a five-member body made up of the governor, the lieutenant governor, speaker of the House, comptroller, and land commissioner. This board should be the entity that decides and then it should go to the House and Senate along with a public briefing as to why the lines have been drawn, based off what Census data. The process needs to be reversed, currently, LRD is only used if the House OR the Senate cannot agree, and it should be that the LRD presents the findings to the House and Senate, the more input the better. After, the public presentation from the LRD to the House and Senate the LRD will have one month to refine the inputs and then send it back to the House and Senate for final approval.

Texas stands to gain additional Congressional seats, based on estimated population growth of about 4 million residents since the last Census in 2010. Those gains are largely the result of the booming Hispanic population, which expanded by 2 million in the past decade and is on track to become the largest demographic group in the state by the mid-2021. Since state Republicans held onto their 20-year majority in the recent election, they are positioned to further entrench their power and unlikely due to the right thing and make sure this population is represented. It is YOUR duty to ensure that this does NOT happen. "If you go back to John Adams and the framers, they talk about how legislatures and Congress should be an exact portrait of the people as a whole," said Li, senior counsel at New York University's Brennan Center for Justice. "When you put your thumb on the scale through a highly politicized map drawing process as typically occurs in Texas, that doesn't take place."

Sources:

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