

Communication from Public

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Redistricting Commission re: Expansion & Independent
Redistricting

Los Angeles City Council Redistricting Commission
Los Angeles City Hall
200 N. Spring St. Room 275
Los Angeles, CA 90012

October 29, 2021

RE: LACCRC Report - Support for Council Expansion & Independent Redistricting

Dear Honorable Commissioners,

We are writing in support of the charter reforms recommended in the Los Angeles City Council Redistricting Commission's draft report. These proposals reflect a reality with which our city must come to terms. We will not be able to offer anything resembling the kind of "fair and inclusive representation" this commission aspired to deliver until the City of LA increases the membership of our City Council and ensures that future district lines will be drawn by a fully independent commission.

Moving to a truly independent redistricting commission is long overdue, but without a larger City Council an independent commission would face nearly all of the same inherent limits that challenged this commission. During last week's final vote, Commissioner Prichard stated, "I think one big issue is that we have faced the structural constraint of only 15 council districts to represent this incredibly large, diverse, and geographically vast region and we have done the best that we can do." The LA Times Editorial Board recently described the small number of districts as rendering redistricting in LA to be "an impossible job."¹ While there will always be tough decisions involved in the redistricting process, a larger number of districts will allow more neighborhoods to remain intact, increase the ability to tailor districts to natural communities of interest, and force fewer tradeoffs between the often competing interests of different voters and communities. With more districts it will be easier to incorporate the input of LA's many stakeholders, while still having the flexibility to maintain a general consensus. Creating new opportunities for representation for one district would not require the dramatic relocation of another council district across the city.

Just as a limited number of council districts inhibited this commission's work, our massive districts also leave our councilmembers with a similarly "impossible job." Expansion of City Council will allow Los Angeles to elect a government that is more representative of our city's diversity and more responsive to its people. The job of an LA City Councilmember has evolved dramatically since 1925, yet we still operate under a council sized for a city that had barely begun to sprawl and had yet to construct its first freeway or airport. Right-sizing our city council gives our leaders a realistic ability to handle core functions like delivering constituent services and the capacity to navigate the intensive work required to build permanent supportive housing.

¹ LA Times Editorial: In Los Angeles, political meddling poisons redistricting.
<https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2021-10-25/los-angeles-city-redistricting>

Trust in LA City Hall has been deeply undermined over the last three years, and our large unwieldy districts have helped reinforce a culture of corruption. Putting the responsibility for governing so many people in so few hands creates an extreme concentration of power and reinforces incumbency protection. Large districts lead to expensive campaigns, meaning that incumbents in this city rarely face a formidable challenger, let alone a runoff. Council expansion would lower the barriers to entry for challengers and ensure that a greater diversity of voices are heard through the electoral process.

We cannot afford to wait until 2031 to finally provide a fully representative government to Los Angeles. Our charter allows for the city to redistrict more frequently than every 10 years,² and it may indeed be ideal for the city to redraw the lines with the insight gained from the Census Bureau's post-enumeration survey which will be available next year.

Redistricting may never be pretty, but it can certainly be a less divisive process and produce a better government. The Los Angeles City Council Redistricting Commission has the clearest view of anyone in the city as to how these factors stymied our year-long redistricting effort. A return to this conversation is certainly warranted and we thank this commission for helping initiate it. A particular thanks is owed to Commissioner Sonja Diaz for compiling a detailed analysis of council expansion.³ *We ask the commissioners to support the report's recommendations on charter reform and ask any commissioners considering voting against the commission report to state their support for these particular recommendations.*

Sincerely,

Citizens Take Action

Northridge Indivisible

East Valley Indivisibles

People's City Council

Feminists in Action Los Angeles

The Valley of Change

Ground Game LA

Unrig LA

LA Forward

West Valley People's Alliance

Ktown for All

White People 4 Black Lives

NoHo Home Alliance

² Charter Sec. 204(c): "...Nothing in this section shall prohibit the Council from redistricting with greater frequency provided that districts so formed each contain, as nearly as practicable, equal portions of the total population of the City as shown by the Federal Census immediately preceding the formation of districts or based upon other population reports or estimates determined by Council to be substantially reliable."

https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/los_angeles/latest/laac/0-0-0-406

³ Draft Final Report of the 2021 LA City Council Redistricting Commission. Appendix M: Report on Expansion of City Council.

<https://laccrc2021.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Final-Report-Draft-10.26.pdf>