

Communication from Public

Name: Nella McOsker
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Council File No: 21-1472
Comments for Public Posting: Please see attached letter.



January 26, 2023

Council President Paul Krekorian
City of Los Angeles
200 N. Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: Independent Redistricting (CF 21-1472)

Dear Council President Krekorian,

We are grateful that you created City Council's Ad Hoc Committee on Governance Reform to take up a range of important reforms, including a focus on establishing a truly independent redistricting process for the Los Angeles City Council and Los Angeles Unified School District Board. This is a necessary response to restore public faith and trust following the now well-known October 2021 conversation among a former labor leader and three LA City Councilmembers when racist and discriminatory comments were made amid a discussion about how the respective Councilmembers could protect their power in the City Council Redistricting process. CCA represents over 300 members who share a mission to enhance Downtown Los Angeles' vibrancy and increase opportunity in the region. As longstanding Downtown civic advocates, we have experienced firsthand the flaws in our governance system that have been exposed time and again. **We write this letter as partners in the Ad Hoc Committee on Governance Reform's efforts to create an Independent Redistricting Commission (IRC) and offer our analysis and considerations with the goal of enriching public discussion.**

In the City of Los Angeles, per the rules established by the City Charter, the City Council is substantially involved in the drawing of districts and maintains the final approval. This makes the process inherently political. First, the City Council appoints the large majority of members to the City Council Redistricting Commission, which act as proxies for their appointing Councilmembers and are tasked with leading the public outreach and drafting of proposed new Council District maps. Councilmembers can remove their commissioners during the process and appoint replacements if they're dissatisfied with their actions. The Redistricting Commission then submits a report and the proposed maps to the City Council for their review, amendments and final adoption.¹

We have seen the pitfalls of elected officials being so heavily involved in the drawing of voting districts. Even prior to the October 2021 discussion and scandal, there were warnings from former Councilmembers who once represented the Downtown LA area but were removed from their districts in the 2012 redistricting cycle.²

There is now momentum and public focus to bring a ballot initiative before the voters to amend the City Charter and make meaningful changes -- this is a critical moment. First, the City must understand and define what "independence" means in the context of redistricting, and what the goals and tradeoffs of reforms are.

¹ Under the City Charter, the process is similar for LA Unified School District (LAUSD) Redistricting, wherein the Council President and Mayor each appoint four members to a 15-member Redistricting Commission and the seven LAUSD Board members appoint one member each. The City Council must review and approve the final maps.

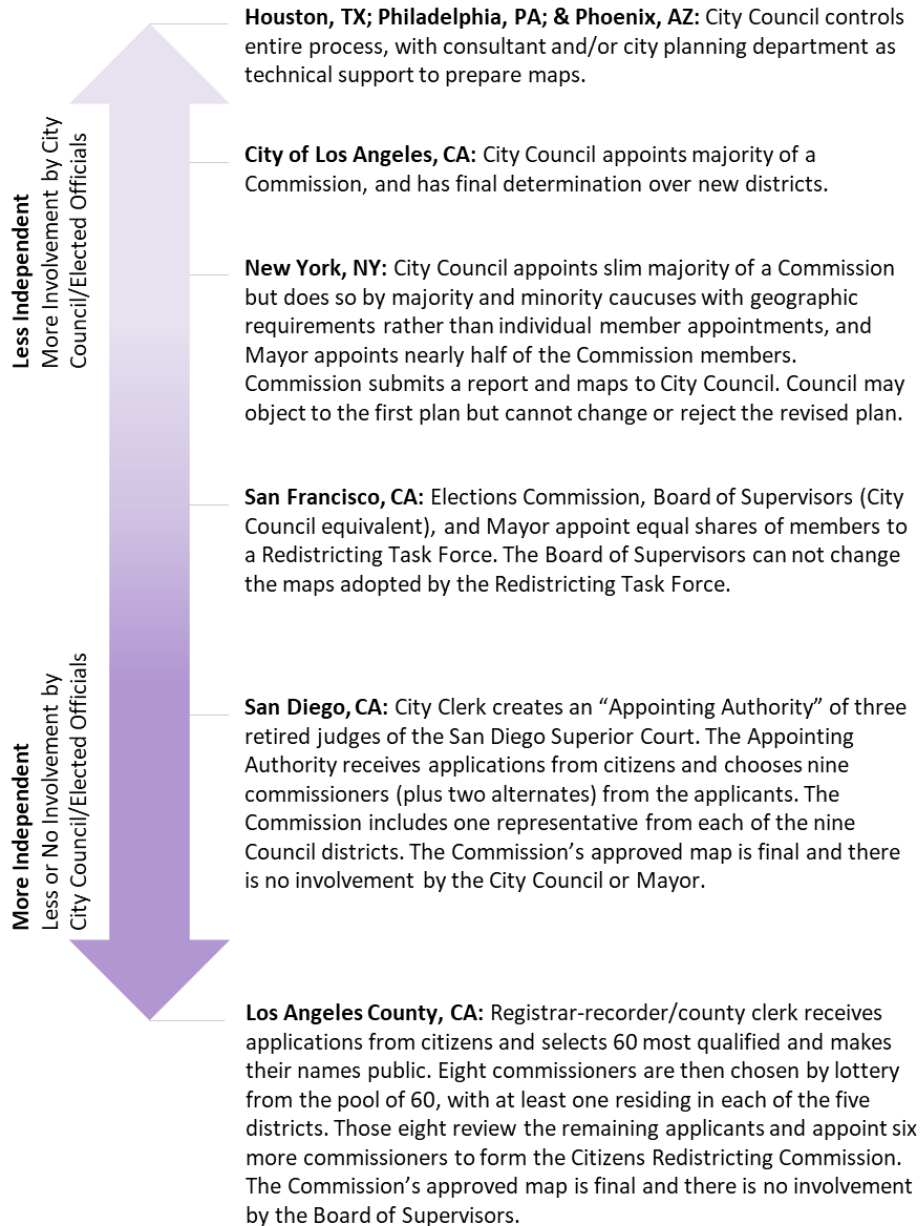
² <https://www.dailynews.com/2012/04/29/bernard-c-parks-and-jan-perry-redistricting-is-hurting-the-progress-weve-made/>
<https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2020-08-10/op-ed-how-jose-huizars-alleged-crimes-hay-have-been-aided-by-redistricting>



Overview of Redistricting in Other Cities

To help inform this public discussion, CCA analyzed redistricting processes used in six other major cities as well as LA County's system for redrawing Supervisorial Districts as summarized in the diagram below. We found that there is a spectrum of independence, or more specifically, the level of elected officials' involvement in redrawing their own districts.

Redistricting Independence Spectrum Among Select Local Jurisdictions



In general, less independent processes are marked by a greater degree of involvement by elected officials, namely through control over the process, via:

- powers of final map approval, including ability to make amendments, and
- having appointments to a redistricting commission (particularly where there is an imbalance of appointment allocation among legislative bodies vs. other appointing officers).

On the other hand, more independent processes are characterized by:

- the absence of elected officials, including no abilities for legislative bodies or other elected officials to amend or approve maps,
- no powers of elected officials to appoint redistricting commissioners (or at least balanced and distributed appointing powers),
- empowered citizen involvement and authority over the process and the incorporation of lotteries into appointment process.

Regardless of the level of City Council and other elected officials' involvement, all processes should have some amount of public outreach and opportunities for public input, which may or may not be incorporated into the drawing and determination of new district maps. **Ultimately, answering the following questions is core to defining independence in redistricting:**

- Are City Councilmembers and/or elected officials involved at in the process at all, whether through appointments to a commission and/or in the legislative process to amend and adopt the maps?
- If there is an appointed commission, how many appointments does the City Council get? How many appointments do other elected officials get? What is the balance of power?
- Who can be appointed to redistricting bodies and how are those members selected?
- Are citizens empowered participants in the process, or is their involvement limited to public comments?

The City Council will be faced with these questions and more when deciding what model to put before voters on the 2024 ballot. We are eager to review the Chief Legislative Analyst's report presenting various redistricting process options in detail when it is published, as well as input from a variety of stakeholders. We present this information to support those efforts and provide a framework that can offer clarity for discussions that move the City toward an IRC.

CCA is a committed partner in redistricting reform as well as broader City of LA governance reforms, including ways of improving representation across the city's communities, establishing clear remedies for elected officials who are unable to do their job, balancing power between the Mayor and City Council and enhancing the planning, development and transportation approval process. We will continue to be engaged on these issues as the Ad Hoc Committee on Governance Reform works to develop recommendations on how the Charter and other aspects of the City's governance structure and practices should be comprehensively amended and strengthened.

We thank you again for your commitment to ethical and transparent leadership and stalwart focus on needed governance reforms.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nella", is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Nella McOsker
President & CEO
Central City Association

Cc: Honorable Members of the Los Angeles City Council's Ad Hoc Committee on Governance Reform