

Communication from Public

Name: Aaron Robertson

Date Submitted: 05/19/2023 08:22 AM

Council File No: 22-1196-S1

Comments for Public Posting: Dear Council President Krekorian and L.A. City Councilmembers, Organize | Unite | Reform LA (OUR LA) is a coalition of community-based organizations working to ensure that the voices and concerns of residents, particularly low-income Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) communities, impacted by racist systems in the City of Los Angeles inform the governance reform process. For the last few months, OUR LA has been working to engage low-income BIPOC residents through in-person convenings and surveys on the topics of redistricting and council district size, among other reform considerations. On behalf of the OUR LA coalition, the attached letter outlines our procedural recommendations for the exploration of charter reform and council district size.

May 11, 2023

Los Angeles City Council Ad Hoc Governance Reform Committee

200 North Spring Street

Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: Size of Council Districts – Council File 22-1196-S1

Dear Council President Krekorian and L.A. City Councilmembers,

Organize | Unite | Reform LA (OUR LA) is a coalition of community-based organizations working to ensure that the voices and concerns of residents, particularly low-income Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) communities, impacted by racist systems in the City of Los Angeles inform the governance reform process. For the last few months, OUR LA has been working to engage low-income BIPOC residents through in-person convenings and surveys on the topics of redistricting and council district size, among other reform considerations.

Currently, Los Angeles residents live in the least representative city in the nation in terms of the ratio between the number of residents and the number of elected council members. With a council size of 15 members, each Los Angeles Councilmember represents nearly 265,000 residents, which far exceeds every peer city in size and population. Our city's decision to have 15 seats was a decision made in 1925, almost 100 years ago, when Los Angeles was notably less equitable, diverse, and populated. Thus, changing the makeup and size of our council districts will have a profound impact on political power in the City of Los Angeles.

As OUR LA continues to engage community members on the preferred size of our council districts, we strongly urge members of the Ad Hoc Committee on City Governance Reform to root your decision-making towards a goal of improving representation, especially for historically marginalized Angelenos, rather than striving for a specific number of districts or residents in a district.

- Will your actions create a different, more meaningful experience between the represented and the representative?
- Will they increase the odds of councilmembers engaging with our communities?
- Will they foster a better understanding of the stakes for the communities councilmembers represent?

As you consider these questions, we urge committee members to also consider the following to improve representation:

- The audio leak confirmed our worst fears, that people in positions of power were purposely shaping district lines that disenfranchise historically marginalized populations, most notably Black Angelenos. As such, there needs to be an acknowledgment of the anti-Black, racist processes that allowed this to happen as you actively discuss the size of our council districts and expansion. Procedurally, your approach needs to be intentional about engaging Black communities around this topic so you may restore trust with local government and more importantly restore solidarity with other communities of color.
- How these issues (council district size and expansion) get resolved will have a profound impact on historically marginalized communities. These communities have often been ignored in this level of decision-making and yet it is these communities of color that are left to compete for attention with other communities because of the current size of our council districts. The large size of our districts forces councilmembers to represent an incredibly large and diverse number of constituents and their interests.

While we appreciate these listening sessions, we also want to share our concerns with the overall engagement process. To foster higher levels of community involvement and input during this process, OUR LA recommends that you:

- Provide the community with public education prior to hearings, more timely notice before hearings, accommodations for multilingual engagement, greater geographic accessibility for residents in different parts of the city, and multimodal accessibility to public comment beyond in-person public comment or written public comment.
- Restore and cultivate trust between residents and local government by informing, affirming, and empowering residents in every council district to share their perspectives and recommendations on the size of our council districts and council expansion throughout the reform process, and not just in individual listening sessions that require in-person participation.
- Provide means of greater transparency and access to demography/mapping tools and data so that the public may feel empowered and informed in conversations about their council district sizes and council expansion.
- Involve and collaborate with community-based organizations, schools, and religious institutions so that they may support outreach to historically marginalized communities, inform residents of these upcoming listening sessions, and assure them that the Committee is dedicated to an equitable governance reform process.

These procedural recommendations will allow the Los Angeles City Council Ad Hoc Committee on City Governance Reform to host meaningful listening sessions across communities and allow residents to openly express their points of views – similar and different – in a space together, restoring trust between residents and local government.

Let us create an authentic and equitable process to foster solidarity and collaboration between communities in Los Angeles, particularly among communities of color.

Let us work together with residents who have historically been harmed by inequitable, racist, anti-Black governmental processes, and learn from each other and find paths forward, together.

Endorsing OUR LA Members

Candice Cho, Managing Director of Policy and Counsel

AAPI Equity Alliance

Dalia Velasco, Policy & Advocacy Coordinator

Alliance for a Better Community

Kevin Cosney, Associate Director

California Black Power Network

Chrissie Castro, Executive Director

California Native Vote Project

Aaron Robertson, Director of Political Voice

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Angelica Salas, Executive Director

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Hector Sanchez, Deputy Political Director

Community Coalition

Henry Perez, Executive Director

InnerCity Struggle

Pete White, Founder & Executive Director

LA Community Action Network

Godfrey Plata, Deputy Director

LA Forward

Rev. Eddie Anderson, South LA Regional
Community Organizer

LA Voice