

Communication from Public

Name: Russia Chavis Cardenas
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submitted via council file (council file no. 22-1196-S1)

CC: John Wickham (john.wickham.lacity.org)

Los Angeles City Council
Ad Hoc Committee on City Governance Reform
200 North Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: Independent Redistricting Commission for the City of Los Angeles

Dear Council President Krekorian and Councilmembers:

As the Ad Hoc Committee on City Governance Reform continues to consider options for the implementation of an Independent Redistricting Commission (IRC), we urge the Committee to advance a proposal that ensures a fair, transparent, inclusive and equitable redistricting process, prioritizes the lived experience of the City's residents, and place on the 2024 ballot an IRC that will garner the confidence of all Angelenos.

The recent "Redistricting Rack-Up" produced by the Office of the Chief Legislative Analyst, along with the discussion at the August 28th Committee hearing, contains essential provisions that we believe are key to a successful IRC in Los Angeles. This includes a two-step commissioner selection process that accounts for the diversity and geographic breadth of the City, robust public input and access requirements, the seating of commissioners for the full decade, and a clear emphasis on the need for a strong ex parte communications ban.

Common Cause and OUR LA both support more inclusive commissioner qualifications. We recommend requiring that candidates be residents of the City for at least three years but would eliminate more stringent requirements such as an active voter registration status. This will provide the necessary opportunity for more Angelenos to participate and be heard during this important process. These provisions will go a long way toward establishing a trustworthy and representative IRC.

However, based on the "Rack-Up" and the discussions in Committee, there are a few considerations that we believe are necessary to ensuring the IRC's success. We highlight a few critical points below:

- **Redistricting criteria must prioritize communities:** The ranking and prioritization of criteria is necessary to ensure that the testimony of residents for communities of interest are at the forefront of the IRC's decision-making. Requirements under federal and state law, along with contiguity, may properly be included at the outset of the redistricting

criteria. After these priorities, we believe the consideration of communities of interest must rank first. Ranking criteria still permits the IRC to consider and balance the numerous inputs and factors that go into map-making but ensures that our communities are at the core of the work.

- **Redistricting criteria cannot include backdoor methods of protecting incumbency:** Criteria such as the “preservation of population cores” or for boundary changes to “limit voter deferral” are backdoor methods of protecting incumbency that cannot be included in any list of redistricting criteria for the City’s IRC. Such approaches lead map-makers to consider preserving already existing districts—despite changes over time, population, and needs of community members—with the alleged goal of “preserving” the population “core.” Additionally, while the limiting of voter deferral as it relates specifically to the *numbering* of Council districts after the maps are completed is an acceptable approach to reduce voter confusion, it is not acceptable as it relates to “boundary changes,” which may have a similar effect as “preserving population cores.” It is critical that the IRC’s redistricting criteria do not include such provisions, as they would disrupt a redistricting process that prioritizes Angelenos.
- **Application and selection process needs oversight:** We understand that the City Clerk may have the necessary relationships and resources to manage and handle the commissioner application and selection process, but we believe it is necessary for the City’s Ethics Commission to have oversight and provide guidance throughout this process.
- **No special opportunity for elected officials to provide input:** The IRC should take testimony and input from all members of the public, which may include elected officials, but any charter language establishing an IRC should not separately require or suggest that the Commission “encourage elected officials to provide testimony at public hearings.” Elected officials should have the ability to provide testimony and input to the IRC but should do so alongside the residents of the City.
- **Supermajority of commissioners needed for critical decisions:** Requiring a supermajority, or two-thirds, vote for decisions such as the removal of a commissioner or to approve a final map will lead to consensus decisions that are less likely to be driven by partisanship or parochialism. This requirement should extend to all critical decisions of the IRC, such as the hiring of staff and consultants, the selection of an alternate to serve as a commissioner in the case of a vacancy, and the second round selection of the final commissioners.
- **Sufficient funding for redistricting:** The City Council should set aside sufficient funding for each redistricting cycle to ensure barriers are eliminated, especially for low-income and underrepresented communities, to apply for the commission and to participate in the redistricting process. This includes adequate compensation and support

needs for commissioners and alternates; resources for materials, tools, communications, interpretation, translation, ASL interpretation, public hearing facilities, refreshments and childcare to offer during public hearings, etc.; and funding for robust staffing and CBO-led educational outreach and workshops.

- **Public meetings must ensure participation:** The charter language should mandate a specified minimum number of public meetings and hearings per region at each phase of the redistricting process that will ensure robust community participation possible. The public meeting and hearing schedule should include a significant share of evening and weekend meetings to accommodate the greatest number of attendees. Every meeting and hearing should allow virtual access, including establishing virtual hubs for digital deserts.
- **Inclusive criteria for commissioner qualifications and selection:** The charter language must make explicit that permanent residents, undocumented residents, formerly incarcerated residents, and non-English proficient speakers are welcomed and encouraged to apply to be on the Commission. During the two-step commissioner selection process, the commissioners in the first step should select the remaining commissioners with a clear and inclusive list of diversity factors that encompass not only race/ethnicity, gender, gender identity, profession, geography, and age, but also:
 - Tribal nations (both recognized and non-federally recognized)
 - Immigrant and refugee communities
 - Non-citizenship status
 - People with disabilities
 - Non-proficient English speakers
 - Income levels
 - Education levels
 - Renter-Homeowner parity
 - Length of residency
 - Skillsets and community/work experience

We appreciate the ongoing dialogue and thank the Committee for your time on this critical matter and look forward to continuing to engage throughout this process.

With gratitude,

Russia Chavis Cardenas

Voting Rights & Redistricting Program Manager
California Common Cause

Aaron Robertson

Director of Political Voice
Catalyst California on behalf of the OUR LA coalition