



Fair Districts GA
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April 19, 2021

To: The Honorable Geoff Duncan, Lieutenant Governor, Georgia State Senate
The Honorable David Ralston, Speaker of the Georgia House of Representatives
All members of Georgia House Legislative & Congressional Reapportionment Committee
All members of Georgia Senate Reapportionment & Redistricting Committee

From: The undersigned coalition of organizations

Subject: Public participation in the upcoming redistricting process

Dear Lt. Gov. Duncan, Speaker Ralston, Senators, and Representatives:

We the undersigned organizations urge you to adopt new guidelines for redistricting that improve public access, public participation and provide more opportunity for timely public comment.

Georgians deserve a redistricting process that inspires trust and confidence from all citizens. In the past, the bulk of the redistricting work has taken place behind closed doors with only minimal public involvement and disclosure. As the law now stands, all legislative communications with the LCRO are by statute deemed legally confidential communications. In addition, both the Open Records and Open Meetings Acts do not apply to the General Assembly. Those secrecy provisions should be waived during all reapportionment deliberations by the General Assembly.

Furthermore, Georgia has almost no laws guiding the development of redistricting plans. The information released for proposed plans is very minimal and not timely enough to allow citizens to comment or advocate for changes before votes are taken in the special legislative session.

During the 2011 cycle, House and Senate provided guidelines under which the committees and legislative staff operated. We have reviewed those guidelines and find that they provide inadequate public disclosure and lack of opportunity for citizen input. In addition to a general waiver of the secrecy provisions noted above, we respectfully submit for your consideration the following provisions for the guidelines that will govern the current redistricting cycle.

Public input

- Public input hearings should occur after census data are released so that current demographics can be taken into account. (We would welcome public hearings this

summer prior to census data release, but a substantial number covering the state should occur after release)

- Public input hearings should be recorded and saved on LCRO's web site
- Committees shall provide for electronic submission of suggested maps and other written input including communities of interest definitions
- Public hearings should allow for the discussion and submission of communities of interest data by Georgians

Accountability

- The committee shall provide a written responses to the communities of interest submissions and clearly indicate whether or not it was deemed applicable and why

Release of information

- Proposed maps must be released for public review via publicly accessible website. Maps should be downloadable files that do not require software for viewing
- Legislature will release a list of all factors taken into account when developing redistricting plans
- Legislature will release expected partisan lean of each district using last statewide election as a benchmark
- Legislature will release analysis of how proposed maps affects the ability of communities of color and VRA-protected language minorities to elect candidates of their choice.
- All plans and input provided to committee and/or committee staff (and LCRO) shall be released via publicly available website

Hearing schedules and timeframes

- Special session dates and rules should be announced at least one month in advance of convening
- Hearings to consider redistricting bills must not take place sooner than two weeks after the proposed maps are released to the public, and not sooner than five days for changed maps
- Hearings to consider redistricting bills must allow for virtual and remote participation, including citizen testimony, via video conference such that citizens from across the state have ample opportunity to participate

Accessibility

- Ensure language access as demonstrated by translating public facing materials into a minimum set of languages required to reach diverse Georgians (at least Spanish, Korean, Vietnamese, Mandarin/Cantonese, Hindi, Arabic). Also demonstrate language access by providing for interpretation where necessary and feasible to gain public input
- Ensure the website is compliant with S.508 of US Rehabilitation Act, making it accessible to people with disabilities

We recognize the challenge you face as leaders of the redistricting effort in this politically charged environment. With the delay in census data and extremely close 2020 elections, the pressure to produce fair maps will be intense and the time frame compressed. Nonetheless, Georgians deserve a redistricting process that instills confidence in the outcome.

We would be happy to meet with your committees to discuss the 2021 redistricting guidelines and these provisions.

Sincerely,

9to5

American Civil Liberties Union of Georgia

All On the Line

All Voting is Local-Georgia

Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Atlanta

Common Cause Georgia

Fair Count

Fair Districts GA

Feminist Women's Health Center

Georgia AFL-CIO

Georgia NAACP

League of Women Voters of Georgia

New American Pathways

Planned Parenthood Southeast Advocates

Progress Georgia

SPARK Reproductive Justice NOW!, Inc.

SiX Action

SPLC Action Fund

The Peoples' Agenda

Women Watch Afrika