

Fair Maps Texas Leaders on 1st Committee Hearing of 2021 Redistricting Cycle

Today, the House Redistricting Committee will hold their first public hearing to begin gathering input from experts and the public on how the next round of district lines should be drawn.

In 2011, Texas drew election maps that intentionally discriminated against people of color. The Federal Court for the Western District of Texas recently noted “the exclusion of minority members and public input despite the minority population growth, the misleading information, the secrecy and closed process, and the rushed process.”

Recently the same panel of judges stated, “Given the record produced in 2011, the State must implement a process that, by any reasonable definition, is ‘fair and open.’”

Therefore, the Fair Maps Texas Coalition is announcing our ‘Fair and Open’ campaign to mark the opening of the public input hearings and the next round of redistricting. Not only do we want to prevent the same mistakes from happening again, but we also want public input at these hearings to be taken seriously. To accomplish this, we have put together a list of guidelines that we want to see the Legislature implement.

1. **Provide Reasonable Notice of Hearings** – Provide notice of hearings and adequate opportunities to review maps before hearings.
2. **Hold a Fair and Open Process** – Hold a public hearing with public testimony on any proposed maps after they have been drawn, but before they pass through Committee.
3. **Provide Adequate Time for Alternative Views** – Give ample time for all legislators, and the general public, to introduce alternative map suggestions.
4. **No Racial Gerrymandering** – Start the process by ensuring districts comply with the Voting Rights Act. Give groups representing communities of color a voice in the process.
5. **No Partisan Gerrymandering** – Don’t look at data showing which political party people vote for while drawing maps.
6. **No Conflicts of Interest** – Incumbents should not draw their own maps.
7. **Don’t Hide or Destroy** – Keep all documents, written communications, emails, text messages and draft maps. The public has a right to full transparency on how and why proposed maps were created.

8. Explain your Work – Explain how the maps were drawn, and why there was any deviation from traditional redistricting principles, including county and precinct splits and population deviations.

You can see more details of this on our website: <https://www.fairmapstexas.org/fair-and-open>

Following are statements from leaders of the Fair Maps Texas coalition:

Joaquin Gonzales, Staff Attorney, Texas Civil Rights Project:

"Redistricting is a complicated process that takes place fairly quickly. Given Texas's history of intentional discrimination when drawing districts, mapmakers need to explain to the public how and why they chose to draw any set of particular maps so that the public can scrutinize their explanations and weigh-in on the new proposals."

Grace Chimene, President, League of Women Voters of Texas:

"We want public input to be taken seriously and to be reflected in the maps. While the Supreme Court said that partisan gerrymandering is ok, this does not mean that the Legislature has a green light to exclude public input in the maps, especially from communities of color."

Lydia Ozuna, President, Texans Against Gerrymandering:

"We want to eliminate partisan gerrymandering--the practice of politicians picking their voters from voting data so that they and their party can remain in power. In Texas this data is derived from voters' primary voting history. Incumbents should not draw their own maps to ensure their reelection or cement their party's power. It's similar to letting the fox guard the hen house. A fair and open redistricting process allows voters to pick their politicians and not the other way around."

Joanne Richards, President, Common Ground for Texans:

"The 2013 Texas redistricting maps have been mired in the courts for over 8 years at a cost of \$5.7 million in taxpayer money. An open and fair redistricting process in 2021 that meets the Texans for Fair Maps high standard of practice could potentially avoid this litigation fiasco."

Robert Elkin, Director, March to the Polls:

"Already, organizations involved in redistricting, including ones associated with members of the Texas House redistricting committee, are following the Hofeller dossier playbook for gerrymandering and encouraging legislators to hide and

destroy their emails and other communications. We want the legislators to know that voters will not stand for such cynical, secretive behavior.”

Dave Jones, President, Clean Elections Texas:

“As the legislative committees begin the redistricting process, we expect the entire process — from beginning to end — to be fully transparent to the general public. There should be full disclosure of every aspect of the legislature's work: data, communications, consultations or proposals, from whatever source. Claims of ‘legislative privilege’ have no place when it comes to redistricting. District lines should not be decided in a back room. Sunshine is the best disinfectant.”

Anthony Gutierrez, Executive Director, Common Cause Texas:

“For decades, the drawing of district lines in Texas has been a complete mess. This first hearing represents an opportunity to finally get it right by prioritizing people and proper representation above political power plays.

Unfortunately, we've seen too many attempts recently of the politicians in power trying to manipulate elections in ways that would intentionally diminish the political clout of communities of color.

We're hopeful the state will refrain from using this process as a tool to manipulate the outcome of elections but stand ready to fight against discriminatory maps - again - if needed.”