

April 12, 2019

The Honorable Phil King
P.O. Box 2910
Capitol Station
Austin, TX 78711

Via email: phil.king@house.texas.gov

Dear Chairman King and Members of the Texas House Committee on Redistricting,

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we are writing to request that a third organizational Committee hearing be held with invited testimony from civil rights and community groups, and that the Committee adopt additional interim field hearing locations.

At the first organizational hearing held by the Committee on Redistricting, Chairman King indicated that such an opportunity for input would exist; however, at the most recent hearing, it was suggested the Committee might not meet again this session. An additional hearing would give groups the opportunity to provide input both on the interim hearings and the redistricting process itself. This is a critical early juncture in the redistricting process and can set the tone for how the 2020 cycle will unfold. **Therefore, we strongly urge the Committee to hold this hearing and announce it in a timely fashion so that interested organizations can prepare testimony.**

On April 4, 2019 the full Committee adopted the Subcommittee's report on hearing locations. Public notice was not posted to indicate this would be an item for consideration, nor was the list made available to the public prior to being brought forward for adoption. As you may know, the field hearing process during the last decennial redistricting cycle was found inadequate by a federal court, which stated that "[the hearings] were of limited usefulness in terms of obtaining meaningful public input for legislators."¹ This year's adopted list appears to largely mimic the 2010 process with a few additions. Although we appreciate that members of the Committee are committed to giving their own constituents a say in the redistricting process, this only highlights how important the opportunity for public input is, and we are confident that other Representatives and, most importantly, citizens across the state are just as interested in engaging in the process.

Rather than taking away the opportunity for citizens in Marshall, Lufkin, Rockport, or Beaumont to be heard, we would like to see you add additional locations that account for the demographic realities of the state. For instance, a full 47% of the entire state's population resides in the counties comprising the Houston and DFW area metroplexes, while only 0.007% of the state's population live in the four aforementioned cities; yet the Houston/DFW metroplexes get the same number of hearings as these cities.

¹ Perez v. Abbott, 253 F. Supp. 3d 864, 960 (W.D. Tex. 2017).

Not only do flawed redistricting processes rob voters of meaningful representation, they also cost the State millions of dollars in after-the-fact fixes. That is why we would like to work with your offices to make sure Texas does not repeat these costly mistakes during this redistricting cycle. Doing so requires transparency and public input, and this begins with the choice on where and when to hold interim field hearings. **We therefore urge you to add to your current list of locations and incorporate the following recommendations for locations, times, and venues for the interim field hearings.**

We have attached an appendix to this letter with a suggested list of additional locations for hearings. In addition to total population, we chose these regions based on three main factors -- growth, diversity, and a history of previous redistricting litigation. In high growth areas, there will likely be a need to add congressional seats and adjust the districts for state legislative seats. Diverse regions require special considerations as to how multiple communities of interest will be impacted by district-drawing. Likewise, a previous history of redistricting litigation in a region indicates a particular need for caution and public comment. Please see the attached appendix for our recommendations.

The number and location of hearings is critical, but the time of the hearings is also a factor which needs to be addressed. In 2010, many of the hearings were held in the morning or the middle of the week days. It is difficult or impossible for many working individuals to attend hearings that are scheduled during these times. Therefore, in general, we recommend that the Committee schedule meetings at times that will extend long enough for individuals to come after normal working hours and be heard. In metroplex areas where there are multiple hearings, we recommend adopting a variety of start times to accommodate the wide variety of individual schedules. Additionally, in order to maximize awareness of the hearings and attendance, the State needs to do more this cycle to advertise the hearings in advance across multiple mediums and in all the major language groups that are spoken in the relevant regions. Furthermore, language assistance should be offered at the hearings, and its availability should be made known in the advertisements.

Lastly, many individuals wishing to attend the hearings come from low-income communities and/or face a lack of transportation options. Communities of color, who continue to suffer from disparate socio-economic conditions, are most affected by these considerations. Therefore, every effort should be made to choose venues that have free parking, are convenient to public transportation, and are fully handicap accessible. All of our organizations would be extremely willing to help in whatever way we can as venue choices are evaluated over the upcoming months.

We ask that you please indicate by the end of next week, April 19, whether you will be holding the third organizational Committee hearing, as described above, and whether you will be considering any of the enclosed recommendations on field hearings. We thank you for taking the time to review our guidance, and look forward to working with your offices on achieving a fundamentally fair and transparent process.

Sincerely,

ACLU of Texas

Clean Elections Texas

Common Cause Texas

Common Ground for Texans

League of Women Voters Texas

MOVE Texas

Texans Against Gerrymandering

Texas Civil Rights Project

Texas NAACP

Texas Progressive Action Network

cc: Members of the Texas House Committee on Redistricting

APPENDIX A
RECOMMENDED FIELD HEARING LOCATIONS

5 total hearings for the greater DFW Metroplex and surrounding counties:

- Central/Southern Dallas County
- Northern Dallas/Southern Collin and Denton Counties
- Western Dallas/Eastern Tarrant County
- Central Tarrant County
- Central/Western Collin County

4 total hearings for the greater Houston Metroplex and surrounding counties:

- Southwestern Harris/Fort Bend County
- Southeastern Harris/Brazoria/Galveston Counties
- Northwestern Harris/Montgomery/Waller Counties
- Central Harris County

2 total hearings for Bexar County:

- Central/Western Bexar County
- Eastern/Northeastern Bexar County

Northern Travis/Southern Williamson Counties (in addition to the hearings at the Capitol that are likely to occur)

Lubbock

Bell County

Corpus Christi

Brownsville