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From: applications.administrator@capitol.local
Sent: Monday, January 25, 2021 12:09 PM
To: Senate Redistricting
Subject: INETMAIL: Redistricting Public Input
Attachments: Testimon final to Senate.docx

Date: 2021-01-25
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Affirm public info: I agree

Regarding: Senate

Message:

Thank you for holding these virtual meetings to hear from the public, I must say that meeting virtually has made it easier for me and others to participate before you! First Happy New Year to all of you!

Hello, my name is Emma Acosta, and I am testifying today on addressing the issues of making the 2021 redistricting open, fair, and transparent. I am here as a member of Texas League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) District IV and the League of Women Voters in El Paso.

The districts that are drawn will be in place for the next ten years. These districts affect real people who live and work in these districts. These districts affect every political issue from the economy to healthcare to public education to transportation planning and funding.

If politicians are elected from districts that do not reflect the population, we will have situations where legislators support policies that most people oppose, or they will not support policies that the vast majority of people do support. When policymakers manipulate maps for personal or political gain, it prevents residents like me from having our voices heard on all of these policies that affect us. Breaking up communities will take away the community's ability to come together and advocate for important issues. In El Paso we have a congressional district # 23 that is contiguous with another city that is 600 miles away in San Antonio as well as many rural communities along the same route. We are a unique city as we are the largest border community in Texas. While San Antonio may say they are the gateway to Mexico, I assure you that El Paso is less than ¼ mile across from Juarez, Mexico. Thus we have unique and challenging situations much different than San Antonio or the rural areas on the same route to San Antonio.

This district will have a congressperson that is not fully committed to listening to the concerns of El Paso. I care about issues like healthcare, affordable housing, gun control, transportation planning and funding, economic development as well as urban infrastructure.

When maps are unfairly engineered, we end up with a legislature that represents special interests and politicians, instead of representing the people.

Because the Texas legislation meets only every other year, and because of the timing of the census our community and the public, unfortunately have a very limited time to review, understand, and comment on any proposed maps the legislature may develop. We have experienced in the past, that state legislators have made this worse by not being open and transparent but by doing everything behind closed doors, discriminating against minority communities, and not giving the public any opportunity to comment on what is happening with the district maps.

The public needs to have a voice in the process so that we Texans and El Pasoans have a fair and equitable representation in order for our democracy to function.

I am asking that this Committee commit to having an open and transparent government, to holding public hearings with public testimony on any maps they develop and before these maps are passed by the legislature. I urge you to give the public sufficient notice and capability to review the maps before any hearing takes place, this is what being open and transparent is about.

Legislators who are tasked with the drawing of maps must be able to explain why the maps were drawn in the manner they are presenting them and why they chose to draw them the way they did. Additionally, all communications they have had regarding drawing the maps should be made available to the public. Providing the public with any communications from other legislators and the public will build trust with us, the public, that the maps have not been unfairly manipulated.

I pray that the legislature does not look at partisanship when drawing up Texas maps. This is an opportunity that only happens once every decade, it is time for our Texas Legislature to be open and transparent, to hold public meetings, to allow the public to voice their concerns and recommendations and finally to accept that this process is in the best interest of the public. Being Open and Transparent with public meetings and allowing voters to weigh in will avoid millions of taxpayer dollars and years of lawsuits. I implore that you will take this testimony to heart. Thank you for taking the time to listen to me today. Thank for serving your communities and please stay safe, we need you at the legislature!

[REDACTED]