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Regarding: Congressional

Message:

Please find our comments related to SB 4 which we are opposed to for a variety of reasons.

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SIERRA CLUB

LONE STAR CHAPTER

Special Senate Select Committee on Congressional Redistricting

The Honorable Phil King, Chair

The Honorable Brandon Creighton, Vice-Chair

Honorable Representatives, Members of Committee

**From: Cyrus Reed, Legislative and Conservation Director, Lone Star Chapter Sierra Club,
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August 5, 2025

**The Sierra Club Lone Star Chapter opposes SB 4 (King) proposed congressional map,
which Splits up & Disenfranchises Communities and Puts Politics over People**

SB 4 is not in the interest of Texas, whether you are a Republican, Democrat or independent voter. It breaks apart communities of interest, creates more partisan districts that will effectively move the November election to a primary contest in which a very small percentage of voters participate, and will lead to more polarized politics. Most of all it means for many voters, it is politicians picking their voters, and not voters picking their politicians. It will lead to more outcomes that do not reflect the values of Texans and make it harder to solve issues related to the climate crisis, disaster relief, clean energy solutions, reasonable water protections and infrastructure and clean, breathable air. While in the short-term it could lead to a power grab by President Trump to have a more favorable outcome in 2026, it is also likely to spur states currently held by democratic Governors to redraw their own districts, leading to a race to make districts more and more partisan and gerrymandered where only a small percentage of voters in

the US lie in competitive districts where good ideas can flourish. An eye of an eye makes the whole world blind.

The Sierra Club has approximately 100,000 supporters and members in the State of Texas. Our members are very involved in issues – particularly those involving clean air, clean water, land conservation – care deeply about our state and planet’s future, and care about the impacts and solutions to our climate catastrophes. They live throughout the state, tend to vote in all elections – more than 95 percent in presidential elections, get involved in local races supporting candidates and are civically engaged. While on the whole they tend to vote Democratic, we have members that are fiercely Democratic, partisan Republicans and many independents. Sierra Club members care deeply about politics, policy and issues that are impacted by how you draw the lines. Districts that have been created through gerrymandering lead to extreme politics, where the voice of a few special interest groups and well-heeled business interests have an easier time influencing policy to the detriment of most Texans. We strongly oppose this power grab.

Redistricting is the process of redrawing the lines that determine who represents us in the United States Congress. Done fairly, it reflects changing populations and ensures every vote counts. Gerrymandering, on the other hand, is when politicians manipulate those lines to protect their power - often by diluting the voting strength of communities of color, working-class neighborhoods, and everyday people.

The goal of SB 4 and the Governor’s special session call on redistricting is to tip the balance of power even more drastically in favor of the ultra-wealthy and polluting corporations by diluting the voices of working communities. With five new seats in congress, the Trump administration would be able to pass more harmful legislation like massive cuts to healthcare, food assistance programs, scientific research, and climate resilience work, while giving more tax breaks and million-dollar handouts to special interests, political donors, and the top 1%. This type of politics leads to more all-or-nothing politics where compromise and good ideas do not flourish. Politicians putting politics, division, and power above the needs of our families, kids, and communities is the opposite of what is needed to help Texans.

We call on the legislature to reject these maps, and in fact, reject the need to do any congressional redistricting in the short-term, and instead let the existing court process play itself out. Texas has a history of creating congressional districts that lead to outcomes that are not

reflective of the state's diverse racial makeup and political views, and SB 4 only makes it worse at the very time that the 2021 redistricting process is still being litigated. In fact, parties to that proceeding have developed their own maps that are not even being considered here today.

More amazingly is that apparently the maps created here today were not written by our Texas representatives - Democrats and Republicans - but by out-of-state consultants working for a partisan redistricting committee. In addition, this redrawing of congressional maps appears to be at the behest of the President - who is not from Texas - and not as a result of some crisis that is needing attention because our voters are asking for it. We should be embarrassed that we are allowing outside politicians to dictate our own actions. In addition, the DOJ letter that appears to be used by the Governor to call for action is not legally defensible, and we believe the courts will ultimately disagree with its arguments laid out in the letter. In fact, the new Department of Justice letter contradicts the sworn testimony of Texas's lead map drawers and its elected officials, and is wrong. The Constitution and Voting Rights Act do not *require* destroying existing coalition districts. Claiming that districts are racial gerrymanders simply because they contain two or more distinct racial groups turns the Constitution and Voting Rights Act upside down and is not worthy of any response by the Texas Legislature.

While we believe the current congressional maps are fundamentally unfair, we do not think it is a good idea to be having a redistricting discussion in a 30-day special session in 2025, five years after the Census was conducted, and while the current maps are still being legally challenged and going through the courts. The Governor added this issue to a special session which we believe should be focussed on the recent flooding and disaster recovery and other issues of importance to all Texans, not on partisan politics, making unfair maps even more unfair. It is wrong – and unfair to all Texans – for the Legislature to take up mid-decade redistricting to further disenfranchise certain communities when the court has not even weighed in on the last round of discriminatory redistricting.

Instead, we would urge this committee to let that legal process play out and leave the maps alone until the legal process determines if they are fair. One thing this legislature could do is pass a law to appoint an independent redistricting committee to draw future maps, which would remove the partisan nature of drawing lines on a map and leave it to experts without partisan intentions. Indeed, as many legislators this special session have suggested by introducing legislation, we should design a thoughtful independent process with an independent committee with a balance to write our congressional and other districts in a way that creates more

competitive districts that keep communities of interest together. This process would not be rushed in a 30-day special session but instead be a longer-term effort to buck the national trend to gerrymander districts and create more solution-based districts.

Not adequate time to even consider these proposed maps

Proposed congressional maps were only released last week and we are being asked as communities to consider complicated congressional maps that completely redraw lines in our major urban centers - DFW, Houston, Austin and San Antonio - as well as the border area. Even understanding the practical effects of these redrawn maps is difficult for those steeped in the numbers, but for the voters whose vote has been moved from one district to another it is nearly impossible. Simply put, trying to ram through new congressional maps in a 30-day session is not fair to anyone.

What SB 4 Appears to Do

The 2021 Maps are already flawed. Even though the 2020 Census showed that Texas has become a majority minority state, two-thirds of our congressional representatives are anglo, most of whom are male, and we have congressional representation that is not reflective of our state's residents. The makeup of Texas' congressional delegation does not reflect the diversity of our state. Texas consists of 60% people of color, but only 34% of our congressional delegation is represented by people of color.

This is not a fight about political parties. It is a fight about political power and who gets to wield it.

SB 4 makes this far worse by packing some districts like CD 30, currently represented by Jasmine Crockett, and splitting apart or cracking other districts. We have seen analysis that if SB 4 were to become law, the 40% anglo population would essentially control 80% of the seats in terms of ethnic and racial makeup. This is disenfranchisement of the highest order and not allowing communities to pick their representatives.

Travis County split five ways to Sunday

These maps completely change and dilute the power of voters in Travis County. Essentially SB 4 packs much of central and east Austin into one district, but then cracks four other parts of Austin and Travis County into four other districts, diluting their power. One proposed district –

District 27 - takes South Austin voters and now moves them into a district that stretches all the way to Port Aransas. I think Chairman King knows that Port Aransas has little in common with South Austin. This is not a community of interest. Another proposed district moves parts of the Capitol Complex itself and West Texas and combines it with voters from East Texas as part of proposed District 10. Putting Longhorns and Aggies in one district seems like a bad idea. Yet another district would go from Travis County all the way to Midland. That is not a reasonable district.

Another change in HB 4 would take current District 35 from the Austin area as essentially an I-35 corridor and move it to South Bexar and other South Texas counties. Areas like Hays County would instead be combined with districts further East. Splitting Travis County into five districts is moving in the opposite direction of creating communities of interest.

Houston and Harris County has been split up

Congressional District 18 - a district once held by Barbara Jordan, and most recently by the late Sylvester Turner - is now split apart and moved mainly into a new district Congressional District 9, which stretches further East and will dilute community power and voices. The newly proposed 18 itself moves further South into Brazoria and Fort Bend counties. It is worth noting that Governor Abbott has effectively already disenfranchised this district by delaying elections. The so-called Big Beautiful Bill which passed by a laser-thin margin, might have had a different outcome had someone been seated that represented the community interests of this traditionally African-American district.

DFW has been packed and cracked

As mentioned the district currently held by Jasmine Crockett in District 30 has been packed and made more of a minority district, while at the same time other districts, including one that was created through court action, have been significantly cracked, creating strange patterns that effectively disenfranchise community voices. Tarrant County under this plan is divided into five districts many of which now stretch very far west - such as District 25 - or further South - like District 6. Again, the impact is to divide communities of interest and dilute the voting strength of minority populations.

The Valley is no longer the Valley?

The three congressional districts associated with the Rio Grande Valley are really no longer representing the Rio Grande Valley. Congressional District 15 - already problematic - becomes even skinnier in some areas near the border and then has a much wider region in the southern plains. Congressional District 34 which begins in Brownsville and the coast now goes further up the Coast to Corpus Christi, again dividing communities. Congressional District 28 goes further west into more rural areas, and even splits Eagle Pass in half.

Bring back communities of interest and reject SB 4

Congressional districts should be drawn fairly, create communities of interest, and not unfairly favor one demographic or another and do not lock in districts that will never be competitive for either of the main political parties. We believe that as is apparent in the recent elections, the maps have been drawn in a way that assures that certain districts are not competitive, and will assure the dominance of one party over the other.

The recent elections last November resulted in the election of 25 Republicans, and 13 Democrats in the Texas congressional delegation, which is not reflective of the split in Texas based on the elections for state or presidential office, and many of the districts are drawn in a way that is unfair to voters. Perhaps of more concern, however, is that because the majority of the districts have been drawn in a way that makes them extremely partisan, elections tend to be decided by primary voters, which then tends to invite more “extreme” candidates, and makes it harder for the major parties to work for bipartisan solutions.

Texas is growing. Even with the difficulty of conducting a Census during a time of COVID that may have impacted our totals, the Census shows an exploding population where virtually every demographic is growing. The state has become more ethnically diverse as both in-state growth among particularly Latino and Asian communities, but also due to immigration from many nations. Our cities and suburban areas are growing, while there has been some loss of population in certain parts of rural and West Texas.

The three areas of the state that have seen particularly high levels of pronounced growth have been in the DFW, Houston-Fort Bend areas and in the areas surrounding Austin, such as Williamson and Hays Counties. We believe that the maps approved by the legislature do not

provide fair maps in particular for the Central Texas, Dallas and Houston areas that better represent communities of interest.

We should not have continued Texas traditions of gerrymandering and map manipulation, where districts are either cracked in such a way that no congressperson, state representative or state senator is representing that community, or packed to unfairly tip the balance toward one political party. No one has been harmed more by map manipulation and voter suppression than Black and Latino communities whose voices have been minimized at the ballot box and in Congress.

We ask that you work to end map manipulation and gerrymandering.

We should consider geographies, communities, watersheds and airsheds not political power

In terms of particular concerns on the current maps, we were upset by the way that the congressional maps split up or watered down communities of interest in the Dallas-Fort Worth and Houston areas (such as in Fort Bend County for example). SB 4 only makes this much worse and also splits apart communities in South Texas, Austin and San Antonio. Going forward, one factor in drawing new districts would be to consider environmental factors, including industrial areas, airsheds, flood or hurricane zones, watersheds or similar topographies (i.e. hill country or blackland prairies). We do not believe the proposed maps -- including in Austin, Dallas Fort Worth and Houston - meet these environmental "communities of interest."

Texas will be best served where we have districts that can truly represent the interests of the people. That will also tend to lead to fairer less partisan districts that will lead to better bi-partisan policy that would be supported by most Texans.

The government works best to solve the real problems of ordinary people when our politics are less polarized and representatives represent communities of interest. Issues like keeping the lights on, reducing pollution, a fair and just immigration system, flood response and disaster recovery, water infrastructure, affordable housing, a living wage, good public schools and accessible quality health care should be the focus of our legislature in Texas and our congressional representatives in Washington for our country. Our elections should ensure that the voices of all citizens are heard, not just special interests, wealthy donors, and racially polarized extreme partisans.

Again we would ask you to reject SB 4, and allow the court system to play out and instead consider taking up a bill to establish an independent redistricting committee and participatory process going forward.