

Koy Kunkel_SC

From: applications.administrator@capitol.local
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To: Senate Redistricting
Subject: INETMAIL: Redistricting Public Input
Attachments: Senate Special Committee on Redistricting Meeting - Muhammad Muizz Akhtar 03_13_21.pdf

Date: 2021-03-13
First Name: Muhammad
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Title: Communications Director
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State: Texas
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Affirm public info: I agree

Regarding: ALL

Message:

Good morning, my name is Muhammad Muizz Akhtar, and I am testifying today on why the 2021 redistricting process needs to be fair and transparent. I represent myself as a lifelong resident of Fort Bend County, along with the Texas Data Quality Coalition as its Communications Director. I live in Texas House District 28, Texas Senate District 18, State Board of Education District 7, and Texas Congressional District 22.

I would like to start by saying that the most important thing for this Committee to do is to respect federal and state law, including the Voting Rights Act of 1965. None of my testimony today should be used by the Texas Legislature to justify diminishing the ability of communities of color to elect the candidate of their choice or artificially distorting maps for racial or partisan purposes.

How districts are drawn affects every political issue, from the economy to healthcare to public education. If politicians are elected from districts that don't reflect the population, you end up with situations where politicians support policies that the vast majority of people oppose, or they won't support policies that the vast majority of people support. When politicians 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.

Purposefully breaking up communities takes away the community's ability to come together and advocate for important issues. For example, here in Fort Bend County we are artificially packed into a congressional district—Congressional District 22—that extends all the way from Katy to Clear Lake, separated by 50 miles. This means that my congressperson can ignore our concerns and those of the communities I am a part of, such as affordable housing, affordable healthcare, and functioning urban infrastructure. When maps are unfairly rigged, you end up seeing a legislature that represents special interests and politicians, instead of representing the people.

Because of the timing of the census and when the legislature meets, unfortunately the public has a very limited time to view, understand, and comment on proposed maps. In the past, state politicians have made this worse by doing

everything behind closed doors, limiting opportunities of communities of color, and not giving the public any chance to comment on what is happening.

In order for our democracy to function, the public needs to have a voice in the process. Therefore, I am asking that this Committee commit to holding a public hearing with public testimony on any maps before they are passed. They must give the public sufficient notice and capability to review the maps before this hearing. I also want the legislators who draw the maps to explain why they chose to draw them the way they did, and to not hide any communications they have had regarding drawing the maps. In order to build trust that the maps have not been unfairly manipulated, I ask that the legislature doesn't look at partisanship when coming up with maps.

This is an opportunity for the Texas Legislature to finally get this process right and avoid millions of taxpayer dollars and years of lawsuits, so I hope that you will take this testimony to heart. I thank Chairwoman Huffman, the committee, and the rest of you for taking the time to listen to me today.



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