



Fair Districts GA
P.O. Box 1482
Decatur, GA 30031
www.fairdistrictsga.org

October 30, 2023

To: The Honorable Burt Jones, Lieutenant Governor, Georgia State Senate
The Honorable Jon Burns, Speaker of the Georgia House of Representatives
All members of Georgia House Legislative & Congressional Reapportionment Committee
All members of Georgia Senate Reapportionment & Redistricting Committee

From: The undersigned coalition of organizations

Subject: Guidelines for the upcoming redistricting process

Dear Lt. Governor Jones, Speaker Burns, Senators, and Representatives:

We, the undersigned organizations, understand that redistricting will be taking place in a special session starting November 29th as mandated by the recent Federal Court decision. As you plan for this upcoming special session, we urge you to adopt new guidelines for redistricting that improve public access, public participation and provide more opportunity for timely public comment.

Georgians deserve a redistricting process that inspires trust and confidence from all Georgians. As part of the 2021 process, the redistricting committees held public hearings during the summer prior to the census data being released and prior to any draft maps being available. These hearings did not give Georgians an opportunity to comment on the actual maps. During the summer hearings, Georgians overwhelmingly asked for three things:

- Transparency – conduct the work in public and allow Georgians time to review the actual maps
- Fairness – end gerrymandering that disadvantages minority voters and benefits any political party
- Respect for their communities

As we now know, those wishes were not respected.

The process was anything but transparent. Once the special session convened, the bulk of the redistricting work took place behind closed doors. Initial draft maps were released only days before committee hearings, and they were changed and released only hours before – and in one case after – the committee(s) met in public and immediately voted. The bottom line is that very few Georgians had a meaningful chance to comment on the maps which would affect elections for a decade.

The process was not fair. In court, the maps' defenders contended that the game plan was to protect a partisan majority. The court has ruled that minority voters were disadvantaged. Independent experts testified to these shortcomings during the 2021 redistricting process; their advice was not heeded.

Your committees now have the opportunity to set a new course. Although your committees will need to move quickly, we urge you to adopt the following recommendations for redistricting.

Transparency and disclosure

- As the law now stands, all legislator communications with the LCRO are by statute deemed legally confidential communications. In addition, both the Open Records and Open Meetings Acts do not apply to the General Assembly. Those secrecy provisions should be waived during all reapportionment deliberations by the General Assembly.

Scope of changes

- Changes to currently enacted maps should be limited to those required to address the remedy ordered by the court. The committees should reject any attempt by members of either party to incorporate other changes for partisan political purposes.

Hearing schedules and timeframes

- Special session rules and the proposed remedy map should be announced within 2 weeks of the judicial ruling.
- Although there won't be time for another state-wide tour, we think Georgians from the affected areas of the state should be given an opportunity to weigh in on any changes. Hearings to consider redistricting bills must allow for virtual and remote participation, including public testimony, via video conference such that Georgians from across the state have ample opportunity to participate. We urge you to reach out specifically to the affected areas of the state to invite their input.

Public input

- Committees should provide for electronic submission of suggested maps and other written input including communities-of-interest definitions
- Public hearings should allow for the discussion and submission of communities of interest data by Georgians.

Release of information & accountability

- Proposed maps must be released for public review via publicly accessible website. Maps should be released in 2 forms: downloadable files that do not require software for viewing (PDFs) and shapefiles readable by GIS software.
- Legislature should release a list of all factors considered when developing redistricting plans
- The legislature should release the expected demographic makeup and partisan lean of each district using last statewide election as a benchmark

- The committee should provide a written response to the communities-of-interest submission and clearly indicate whether it was deemed applicable and why.
- Legislature should release the analysis of how proposed maps affects the ability of communities of color and VRA-protected language minorities to elect candidates of their choice. This should demonstrate that the maps are addressing the court’s order for remedies.
- All plans and input provided to committee and/or committee staff (LCRO) shall be released via publicly available website

Accessibility

- Ensure language access as demonstrated by translating public facing materials into a minimum set of languages required to reach diverse Georgians (at least Spanish, Korean, Vietnamese, Mandarin/Cantonese, Hindi, Arabic). Also demonstrate language access by providing for interpretation where necessary and feasible to gain public input
- Ensure the website is compliant with S.508 of US Rehabilitation Act, making it accessible to people with disabilities.

We recognize the challenge you face as leaders of the redistricting effort on a compressed time frame. We also recognize that the maps will be subject to much scrutiny in the courts. Nonetheless, Georgians deserve a redistricting process that instills confidence in the outcome. Guidelines should be changed for this cycle to meet this objective.

We would be happy to meet with your committees to discuss the guidelines and these provisions.

Sincerely,

1000 Women Strong
 9to5 GA
 Act2Change
 Asian American Advocacy Fund
 Black Voters Matter Fund
 CASA in Action
 Common Cause Georgia
 Communities United for Justice
 Equity for All
 Fair Districts GA
 Fair Fight Action
 Faith in Public Life
 For Which It Stance
 Georgia AFL-CIO
 Georgia Equality
 Georgia Muslim Voter Project
 Georgia Redistricting Alliance
 Georgia Shift

Georgia Stand-Up
 Georgia Values Action
 Georgia Youth Justice Coalition for Action
 Indivisible Georgia Coalition
 League of Women Voters of Georgia
 Mi Familia Vota
 Migrant Equity Southeast
 New Georgia Project
 Peach Concerned Citizens, Inc.
 Protect the Vote GA
 Rep GA Institute
 Represent GA Action Network
 Rise, Inc.
 SOWEGA Rising
 State Innovation Exchange
 Women Watch Afrika, Inc.
 Working Families Party