



LOCAL POWER MATTERS

**A POLICY TOOLKIT TO BUILD
POWER AT THE LOCAL
LEVEL**

Introduction

From administering schools to the management of roads and public services, locally elected officials have the power to impact our daily lives. While Georgia's legislature passes policies at the state level, local governments take on implementation, in many cases. For example, in 2022 the state legislature passed a ban on "divisive concepts" being taught in school, which was a proxy term used to describe the history and current status of racism in the United States. The Cobb County school board proceeded to pass a rule banning "controversial issues." Based on that rule, the School Board voted to fire a teacher for reading a book to her classroom, even though this was a book her students voted to hear. In this example we see that School Board members, who are elected into office by residents of their county, prioritized a wave of harmful "book ban" politics leading to real life policies that amount to censorship in schools. There are countless examples of how locally elected officials have the power to impact the day to day lives of our families and communities and how you, as an advocate and member of your community, can push for progress.

Importance of Local Policy Change

The bulk of media attention and resources are focused on policy change at the federal and state levels, but in Georgia we see a dire need for local policy change advocacy. The City of Tucker provides a good case study. Because the State of Georgia has no state law that offers protections against discrimination for all citizens, organizers in the City of Tucker rallied support for a local non-discrimination ordinance to protect its residents. After 4 years of advocacy and community education the ordinance passed in July of 2023 with a unanimous vote by the City Council members, despite the fact that the Mayor hotly contested its passage.

Local policy change can bridge the gaps where state or federal laws fall short. Redistricting advocates of Georgia have long-advocated for voting rights for our state. While we still have the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA), it was greatly weakened in 2013 when the Supreme Court, in the *Shelby v Holder* case, nullified the VRA's standard for deciding which states require federal oversight in their voting practices. From that point on, our legislature has no longer been required to have voting changes "pre-cleared" by the Department of Justice. And, because Georgia does not have its own state-level Voting Rights Act, we have seen discriminatory changes to how we vote in dramatic ways. Redistricting has been used to try and maintain the status quo instead of reflecting Georgia's changing demographics across the state.

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While advocates must always push for policy change at the legislative level, it is clear that local policy change is a viable and critical step towards making progress at the state level. Local resolutions create a more transparent and accessible representation of multifaceted communities' interests and values. They create an administrative empowerment record of benchmarks and agreements of the local city, municipal, school board, and judicial circuit redistricting process that has been ushered by local communities and voted into record by elected bodies

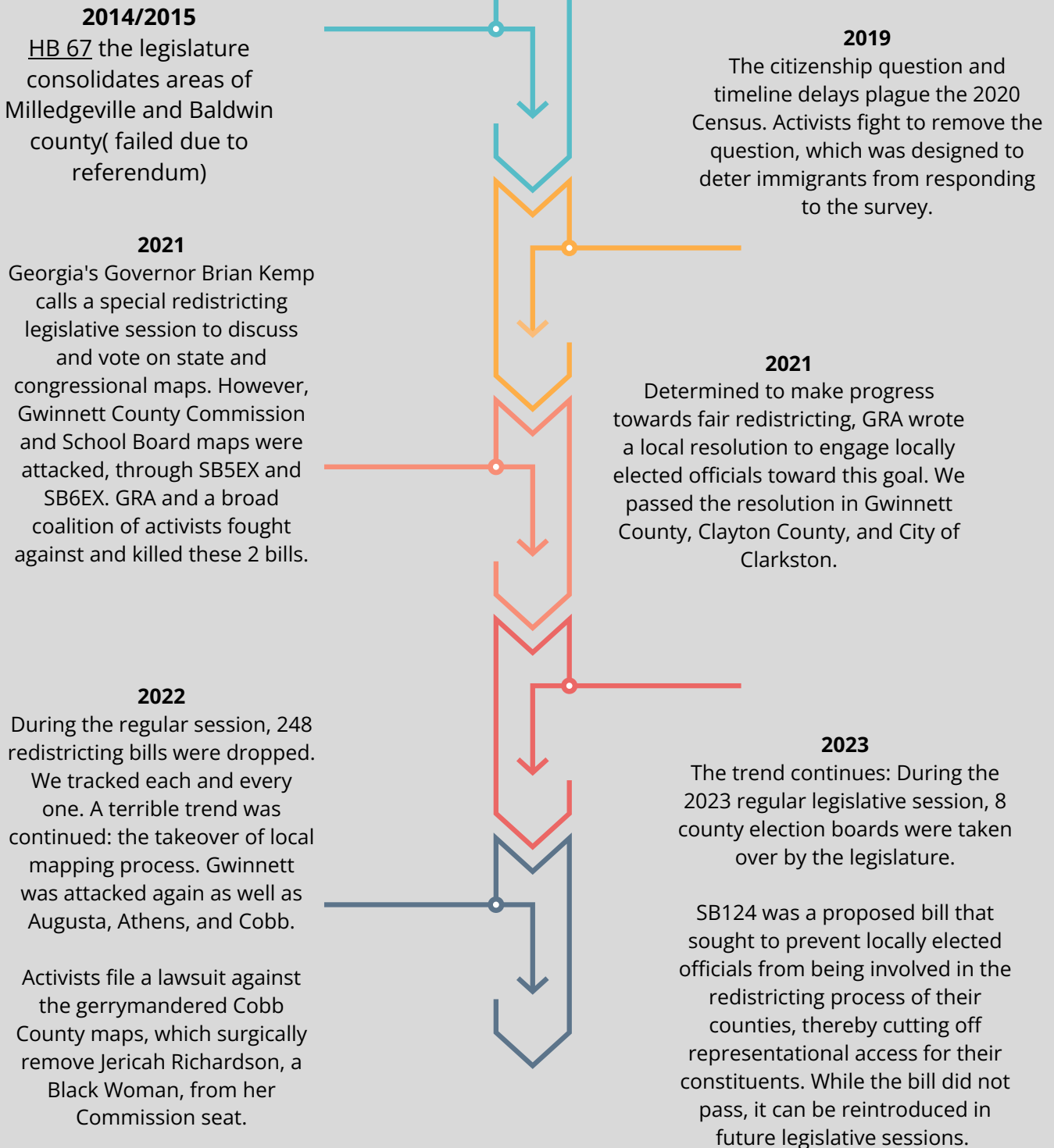
In 2021, the Georgia Redistricting Alliance created a local resolution that local governments can pass to take a step towards fair and transparent redistricting. Harvesting a transparent and meaningful redistricting process includes preparing for the 2030 census and creating inclusionary efforts to educate and empower communities. We believe committing to a complete count includes reenvisioning what standards and issues are used to define and categorize the populations and communities we represent. Also, the American Community Survey (ACS) is the only source of comparable, quality information about the people in all our communities. This is a vital source of information that is used by many groups ranging from communities to businesses. Census and ACS data informs the policy changes that are needed, critical resources that need to be garnered, and how communities can target engagement within their jurisdictions.

The Georgia Redistricting Alliance, Common Cause GA and Women Watch Afrika targeted Gwinnett County, Clayton County and the City of Clarkston because these are jurisdictions where we saw wide shifts in population, systemic patterns of gerrymandering, and where we could capitalize on the mobilization work and momentum of political participation that is already occurring. It matters that local resolutions were passed in these counties due to the impact of public and elected delegations being able to gather together to gain education about the process, intentionally challenge and align redistricting process and serve as a clear counterpoint to the current opaque and inaccessible redistricting process. Lastly, the jurisdictions that passed resolutions reflected the population complexities and growth of the Atlanta metro area.

The jurisdictions that passed resolutions are a microcosm of the story of how the Atlanta metro area has exploded in cultural, economic, and social growth while reconciling the complexities of the relics of southern history. Passing local resolutions has been a solidarity and empowerment tool for democracy, centering communities and locally elected officials to continue to have autonomy in their local redistricting processes.

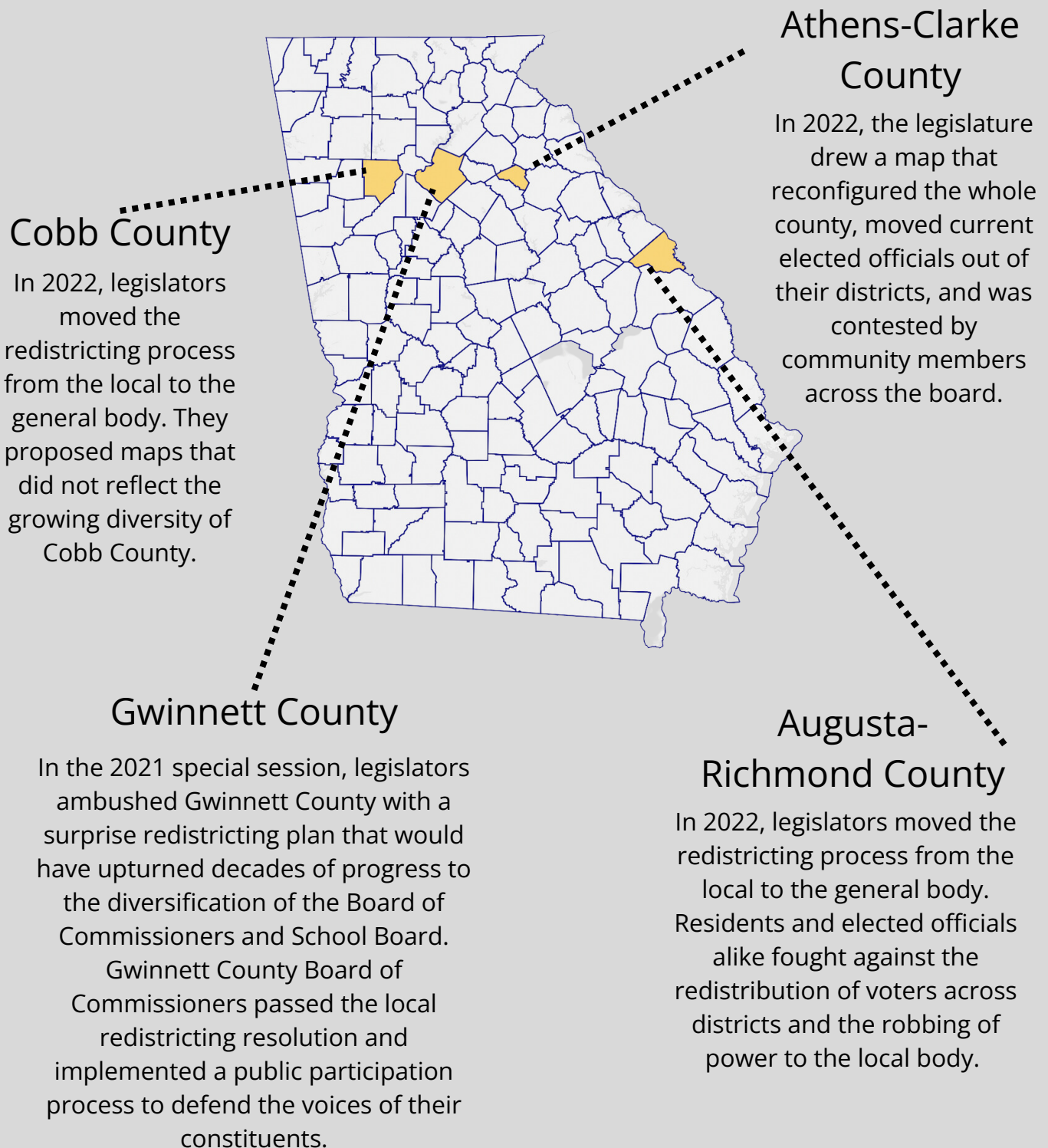
We continue the work to expand redistricting resolution adoption across the state, especially in light of the increased attacks we have against the power of local governments. The state legislature has attempted to remove local commissioners from the redistricting process of their counties and has attempted to take over local boards of elections. Now, more than ever, there is great urgency to strengthen democratic processes at the local level.

At the local level, we are seeing a terrible trend of democratic process takeovers.



Click [here](#) for a full issue brief on SB124

During the 2021, 2022 and 2023 legislative sessions, local power faced unprecedented attacks.



Principles for Fair Census and Redistricting

When we fight for fair census and redistricting, we are clear on our demands.

1. District boundaries should be drawn according to clearly described criteria, including respect for:
 - The U.S. Constitution's requirement of one person, one vote;
 - The Voting Rights Act (VRA);
 - Contiguity requirements (to draw districts as one connected area);
 - Communities of interest, city and county boundaries;
 - Political competition, where this does not conflict with the above criteria
 - Compactness, where this does not conflict with the above criteria;
 - The addresses of any individual, including an incumbent officeholder or candidate, shall not be considered when any district is drawn.
2. All levels of government should conduct a transparent redistricting process with full opportunities for public participation, which includes that all redistricting plan information should be available in a timely fashion, free of charge, and via a public website with downloadable files that do not require software for viewing. The entire process should be accessible in multiple languages other than English.
3. The public should be provided the ability to draw and submit maps for the local jurisdiction and Georgia General Assembly consideration.
4. The Georgia General Assembly should respect local jurisdiction's autonomy and amenity, and not undermine or replace maps made with local and community input.
5. If new maps are being proposed by any governmental entity, including any changes or new drafts, there must be a hearing for all community members to have the opportunity to voice their views and have a say. Members of the public should have ample time and access to participate in these opportunities.
6. Hearings to consider redistricting bills must not take place sooner than two weeks after the proposed maps are released to the public, and not sooner than five days for changed maps. Hearings must allow for virtual and remote participation, including citizen testimony, via video conference such that citizens from across the state have ample opportunity to participate. Those tasked with redistricting must provide a written response to the communities of interest submissions and clearly indicate whether or not it was deemed applicable and why, and urge the Georgia General Assembly to do the same.
7. Redistricting should occur once every 10 years following the decennial U.S. Census and Congressional Reapportionment and should be done primarily using decennial census data. American Community Survey data and other alternative data sources may be used as required by the Voting Rights Act and to protect and preserve communities of interest. Mid-cycle redistricting should be avoided.
8. The local Jurisdiction should form independent redistricting bodies, like an advisory committee, mapping commission, or something similar, that are composed of community members and non-partisan government officials, to help ensure a fair, transparent, and non-partisan redistricting process.
9. The local jurisdiction should encourage more participation in the census from the community, including encouraging the creation of a community-led advisory committee for census (a complete count committee) which can also serve as an advisory space for redistricting trainings, community mapping, and draft map input planning
10. Advertising the census and ACS in multiple languages and for multiple years leading up to 2030, is critical.

HOW TO ADVOCATE FOR LOCAL POLICY CHANGE

STEP 1 Check government websites, media sources, and social media from lawmakers/political parties/advocacy groups to find information on when meetings are held.

STEP 2 In counties where maps are drawn by lawmakers or elected officials, talk with the elected officials involved in the process to learn what to expect.

STEP 3 Ask city councils to pass resolutions advocating for fairness and transparency in redistricting. See Appendix A for an example resolution. Download a copy [here](#).

STEP 4 If the process is not done publicly, advocate for opportunities for public input

STEP 5 Ask critical questions of change makers, such as

1. Who should be at the table to describe our community and interest?
2. What are the standards or metrics of quantitative data used to justify changes and adjustments to boundaries

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you would like to learn more about passing a local resolution or receive assistance, please reach out to the contacts below.



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Appendix A: Sample Local Redistricting Resolution



RESOLUTION NO.

WHEREAS, government derives its legitimacy from the will of the majority and must remain regularly accountable through meaningful elections; and

WHEREAS, the General Assembly is responsible for drawing congressional, legislative, and local districts in the State of Georgia through a legislative process subject to gubernatorial veto, and these districts will determine whether voters have equal opportunities to elect candidates who share their lived experience for the next decade; and

WHEREAS, local counties and municipalities also play a significant role in redistricting, and typically create the maps for their jurisdictions that are then submitted to the Georgia General Assembly for approval; and

WHEREAS historically, a lack of transparency in the redistricting process has led to the adoption of heavily partisan district maps, and without legislation codifying transparency; and

WHEREAS, the redistricting process should be conducted in an open manner with real opportunities for public dialogue and feedback, not behind closed doors; and

WHEREAS, districts should not be drawn for the purpose of favoring or discriminating against any political party or candidate, and;

WHEREAS, Section 2 and Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act prohibit the use of voting practices or procedures, including redistricting plans, that dilute minority voting strength; and

WHEREAS, the Fourteenth and Nineteenth Amendments of the Constitution of the United States of America ensure equal protection under the law for the right to vote for all eligible American citizens; and

WHEREAS, this body maintains that voters should choose their representatives instead of representatives choosing their voters; and



WHEREAS, public input and involvement in the redistricting process will empower our communities from the start by allowing communities to elect representatives who represent their interests on issues that are important to their lives; and

WHEREAS, Georgia voters should have access to the redistricting process regardless of their means, their language spoken, their access to media, their proximity to the State Capitol or other geographic factors; and

WHEREAS, voters are more likely to participate when they feel that their vote will count and that they have a reasonable chance of electing candidates who represent their interests; and

WHEREAS, fair redistricting can secure meaningful representation for voters if completed properly, and can keep both small towns and rural areas with similar interests as well as suburban or urban districts in cohesive districts that keep representatives attentive to the needs of their constituents; and

WHEREAS, the best defense against unfair redistricting practices are transparency, bipartisan legislation, and independent redistricting bodies comprised of publicly elected and non-partisan government officials

WHEREAS, there is a notable connection between Redistricting and the Census; and

WHEREAS, the jurisdiction understands that a complete and accurate count for the Census is connected to the process of Redistricting, and

WHEREAS, community involvement is a key factor in having an accurate and complete Census count.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the [INSERT MUNICIPALITY/BODY] Council of the City of _____, Georgia, will conduct any future or currently ongoing redistricting process in a fair, transparent, non-discriminatory and politically neutral manner and commits to a complete and accurate census count, building partnership with trusted community leaders and the census bureau, as well as urging the Georgia General Assembly to do the same.



BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that [INSERT MUNICIPALITY/BODY] will draw [INSERT MUNICIPALITY] districts - or urge the General Assembly to draw districts - in accordance with the following:

1. District boundaries should be drawn according to clearly described criteria, including respect for:
 - a. The U.S. Constitution's requirement of one person, one vote;
 - b. The Voting Rights Act (VRA);
 - c. Contiguity requirements (to draw districts as one connected area);
 - d. Communities of interest, city and county boundaries;
 - e. Political competition, where this does not conflict with the above criteria
 - f. Compactness, where this does not conflict with the above criteria;
2. The addresses of any individual, including an incumbent officeholder or candidate, shall not be considered when any district is drawn.
3. The [INSERT MUNICIPALITY/BODY] should conduct a transparent redistricting process with full opportunities for public participation, and urge the General Assembly to do the same. All redistricting plan information should be available in a timely fashion, free of charge, via a public website with downloadable files that do not require software for viewing.
4. The [INSERT MUNICIPALITY/BODY] should 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, and urge the Georgia General Assembly to do likewise.
5. The public should be provided the ability to draw and submit maps for [INSERT MUNICIPALITY/BODY] and Georgia General Assembly consideration.
6. The Georgia General Assembly should respect local jurisdiction's autonomy and amenity, and not undermine or replace maps made with local and community input.



7. The public should be given ample notice to participate in any [INSERT MUNICIPALITY/BODY] and Georgia General Assembly meetings, committee meetings, and public hearings.
8. If new maps are being proposed by any governmental entity, including any changes or new drafts, there must be a hearing for all community members to have the opportunity to voice their views and have a say.
9. Hearings to consider redistricting bills must not take place sooner than two weeks after the proposed maps are released to the public, and not sooner than five days for changed maps. Hearings must allow for virtual and remote participation, including citizen testimony, via video conference such that citizens from across the state have ample opportunity to participate.
10. [INSERT MUNICIPALITY/BODY] must provide a written response to the communities of interest submissions and clearly indicate whether or not it was deemed applicable and why, and urge the Georgia General Assembly to do the same.
11. Redistricting should occur once every 10 years following the decennial U.S. Census and Congressional Reapportionment and should be done primarily using decennial census data. American Community Survey data and other alternative data sources may be used as required by the Voting Rights Act and to protect and preserve communities of interest.
12. Mid-cycle redistricting should follow the guidance and standards of the decennial U.S. Census and Congressional Reapportionment and should be done primarily using decennial census data. American Community Survey data and other alternative data sources may be used as required by the Voting Rights Act and to protect and preserve communities of interest.
13. The local Jurisdiction should form independent redistricting bodies, like an advisory committee, mapping commission, or something similar, that are composed of community members and non-partisan government officials, to help ensure a fair, transparent, and non-partisan redistricting process.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that [INSERT MUNICIPALITY/BODY] City Council will commit to a transparent, complete, and accurate census count in 2030 in accordance with the following:

1. Committing to a complete and accurate census count, which includes partnership with the census bureau and trusted community leaders.



2. Taking into account the data collected by trusted leaders, communities of interest, and community-based census advisory committees.
3. Encourage more participation in the census from the community, including encouraging the creation of a community-led advisory committee for census (a complete count committee) which can also serve as an advisory space for redistricting trainings, community mapping, and draft map input planning
4. Advertising the census and ACS in multiple languages, and in multiple years leading up to 2030.
5. Posting census pledges visibly.

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the [INSERT MUNICIPALITY/BODY] shall not draw maps that favor or disadvantage a political party, candidate, or incumbent, and that they will urge the Georgia General Assembly to do the same.

Adopted

ATTES *Flt:ttt*
Georgia

On behalf of the [INSERT MUNICIPALITY/BODY],

Clerk of _____ Council



Georgians Demand Meaningful Public Input

Despite repeated calls from advocates for transparency and inclusion in redistricting processes, the Georgia Legislature has failed to respond. We demand transparency and inclusion with redistricting processes at every level of government.

The current systems don't work for Black, Brown, and immigrant communities of Georgia. Our communities must be part of the process in meaningful ways to ensure that we are not further disenfranchised by racial and partisan gerrymandering.

We demand that additional steps be taken to improve access to this process, specifically for immigrants and communities of color across the state. I am not alone in my concerns about how these hearings are proceeding. I along with numerous community members demand a transparent and equitable redistricting process. These demands include:

- To ensure **public input**, the committees must provide communities adequate time and opportunity to discuss and submit suggested maps and written input
- To ensure **accountability**, the committee must provide a written response to the public's submissions and clearly indicate whether or not it was deemed applicable and why.
- To ensure a proper **release of information**, the committee must release proposed maps along with its analysis for public review via a publicly accessible website with downloadable files that do not require software for viewing.
- To ensure that **hearings and timeframes** are fair, the committee must allow for virtual and remote participation, including citizen testimony. Hearing schedules must be announced at least two weeks in advance to allow citizens from across the state to have ample opportunity to participate.
- To ensure **accessibility**, the committee must demonstrate a commitment to language access 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) and by providing for interpretation where necessary and feasible to gain public input.
- To further ensure **accessibility**, this committee must be compliant with S.508 of the US Rehabilitation Act on their website, where all materials and information is shared, making it accessible to people with disabilities.