



Phil King
Chair

Chris Turner
Vice-Chair

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON REDISTRICTING
TEXAS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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April 23, 2019

Mr. Joaquin Gonzalez
Texas Civil Rights Project
via email: joaquin@texascivilrightsproject.org

Dear Mr. Gonzalez,

As Chairman of the House Redistricting Committee, I write to thank you for your April 12 letter regarding the interim field hearings that the Committee is planning. The Committee appreciates the time you have taken to reach out with your ideas and suggestions. I think you will be pleased to learn that there is substantial agreement about how the interim field hearings should proceed, and that many of your ideas are already part of the Committee's plans for the interim. I hope that you will also find the information in this letter useful in addressing the four topics raised in your letter: interim hearing locations, interim hearing accessibility, the interim hearing location selection process, and opportunities for groups like yours to provide input.

Interim hearing locations. Your letter suggests additional interim hearings—with specific emphasis on the Houston and DFW metroplexes¹—and I am pleased to inform you that the Committee plans to hold multiple hearings in each of these areas. An additional DFW-area hearing was added by amendment to the subcommittee on interim hearings' report before its unanimous adoption by the full Committee. This report also provides the Chairman of this Committee with flexibility to schedule additional hearings “in major geographical areas already identified to ensure input

¹ Letter from Joaquin Gonzalez, Texas Civil Rights Project, to Chairman Phil King and Members, Tex. House Comm. on Redistricting 1 (April 12, 2019) (via email) (“a full 47% of the entire state’s population resides in the counties comprising the Houston and DFW area metroplexes.”).

Members:

Sheryl Cole, Matt Krause, Lyle Larson, Jeff Leach, Ben Leman, Ina Minjarez, Joe Moody, Chris Paddie,
Four Price, Toni Rose, Senfronia Thompson, Armando Walle, James White

from both urban and suburban communities of interest” within those metroplexes.² Under this provision, I have directed the Committee staff to schedule multiple hearings in the Houston area as well. Like our public hearings in Austin during the legislative session, the interim field hearings will continue for as long as it takes for all witnesses to have their opportunity to testify.

Interim hearing accessibility. This Committee shares your desire to ensure that all stakeholders have access to the interim field hearing process. I am therefore pleased to inform you that the Committee is exploring options for livestreaming the interim hearings to allow those interested to watch in real time. This way, even those unable to attend in person have the benefit of this context to inform their further engagement in this process. I am optimistic that we will be able to make a livestream available and will share details once they have been finalized.

Our plans for the interim also already include many of your accessibility-related ideas. The Committee plans to provide translation assistance at any hearing upon request. And, of course, individuals may also bring their own translators pursuant to the House Rules.³ I intend to encourage all members of the House to publicize these hearings to their constituents across the state to maximize engagement. When encouraging members to promote awareness, I will note that languages other than English should be considered for outreach efforts to the extent spoken in each district. Finally, I intend to work closely with members from each region to identify field hearing facilities that are handicap accessible, with maximum access to free parking and all available public transit.

Location selection process. Your impression that the subcommittee process lacked adequate “transparency and public input”⁴ indicates that you may not have all the facts. I hope that I can offer some clarity by pointing you to the Committee’s records.

At the February 28, 2019 organizational hearing, I appointed a bipartisan subcommittee of members from diverse areas of the state to propose interim hearing locations.⁵ Through the process detailed in its report, and under the leadership of Chairman Matt Krause and Vice-Chair Ina Minjarez, the subcommittee unanimously issued recommendations, which the full Committee unanimously adopted at its April 4, 2019 hearing.⁶ Both the February 28 and April 4 hearings were held pursuant to proper notice under the House Rules, open to the public, livestreamed, and remain available online along with the hearing minutes and witness lists. In making its recommendations, the subcommittee had the benefit of testimony from the State

² Tex. House Comm. on Redistricting, Subcomm. on Interim Hearings Report 3, 86th Leg., R.S. (adopted Apr. 4, 2019).

³ See Tex. H. Rule 4, Sec. 20(h), H. Res. 4, 86th R.S.

⁴ Letter from Joaquin Gonzalez, Texas Civil Rights Project, to Chairman Phil King and Members, Tex. House Comm. on Redistricting 2 (April 12, 2019) (via email).

⁵ Tex. House Comm. on Redistricting Minutes 2, 86th Leg., R.S. (Feb. 28, 2019).

⁶ Tex. House Comm. on Redistricting Minutes 2, 86th Leg., R.S. (Apr. 4, 2019).

Demographer and the United States Census Bureau, offered during the February 28, 2019 organizational hearing.

This process was fully transparent, and I am confident that the subcommittee considered any input that they received on interim hearing locations during the month between being appointed to the subcommittee and the issuance of the report. Because we are unable to hold an interim field hearing in every Texas county, I am committed to making the hearings that we do hold as productive as possible, and welcome continued suggestions on how to do so.

Input from outside groups. Your letter suggests that the Committee hold an additional organizational hearing this legislative session “with invited testimony from civil rights and community groups.”⁷ Earlier this session, there was some discussion about the prospect of hearing such testimony, but until your letter last Friday, no civil rights or community group expressed interest in testifying at an organizational hearing—not to me, and as far as I am aware, not to any member of this Committee. In fact, to the extent I am advised of communications between members of this Committee and outside groups, those groups indicated that they did not wish to participate in our organizational hearings. Thus, at this preliminary stage, the Committee heard invited introductory testimony to begin acquainting members with this complex process.

During the February 28 organizational hearing on “2021 Redistricting: Data and Tools,” the Committee heard invited testimony from the Texas Legislative Council and US Census Bureau. During the March 7 organizational hearing, “Redistricting Requirements and Demographic Trends,” the Committee heard invited testimony from the State Demographer and the Office of the Attorney General. In the interest of facilitating a collaborative, nonpartisan discussion, I invited Vice Chair Turner to bring in a witness to present at this hearing as well, and the Vice Chair brought in Dr. Allan Lichtman, Distinguished Professor in the Department of History at American University.

This session, the question of redistricting following the 2020 census is not before us. Our organizational hearings are about level setting the Committee and beginning what promises to be to be a long, nuanced, and complex discussion. With just a few weeks left in the legislative session and preparations for the interim field hearings underway, the Committee is unable to accommodate an additional organizational hearing to hear invited testimony from civil rights and community groups, as your letter requests. The interim field hearings, however, are being arranged for the express purpose of soliciting input from stakeholders across Texas, and I hope you will avail your organizations of this opportunity so that we may hear from you. I look

⁷ Letter from Joaquin Gonzalez, Texas Civil Rights Project, to Chairman Phil King and Members, Tex. House Comm. on Redistricting (April 12, 2019) (via email).

forward to participation from all interested groups during those hearings, and I hope that this will continue into 2021.

I appreciate the interest that you and the organizations who joined your letter have taken in this process. As Chair of this Committee, I am committed to fostering a robust, open, and constructive discussion among all stakeholders as we approach 2021. And I will work diligently to ensure that process, and its end product, complies with the law. By doing so, I believe we can avoid costly and time-consuming court battles resulting in increased divisiveness between and among political parties and communities, none of which is good for Texas or Texans. I am hopeful that you will join me in this effort, and I look forward to working together to further the best interests of our state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Phil King". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Representative Phil King
Chairman, House Redistricting Committee

CC: Office of the Speaker; Members of the House Committee on Redistricting