

June 13, 2019

The Honorable Phil King
P.O. Box 2910
Capitol Station
Austin, TX 78711

Via email: phil.king@house.texas.gov

The League of Women Voters of Texas thought it pertinent to send a separate letter to the House Redistricting Committee in regards to the organization of the Field Hearings for the upcoming redistricting cycle in 2021. We are deeply concerned that some of the same mistakes that were made during the 2011 Field Hearings are being made once again. Both at the national and state levels, the League of Women Voters has a long history of advocating for fair, transparent, and accountable redistricting practices. In line with our stated position on redistricting, we feel very strongly that there need to be improvements made in the current effort being put forth by the House Redistricting Committee to facilitate greater accessibility of the Field Hearings to the public.

The League, along with partnering organizations, sent two letters to the Committee, dated April 12, 2019 and June 13, 2019, which will be sent as additional attachments with this letter. Some of our deepest concerns in these letters were also cited as shortcomings of the 2011 redistricting effort by U.S. District Judge Xavier Rodriguez during the recent hearing in which the Federal District Court for the Western District of Texas reviewed evidence for the bail-in provision of Section 3 of the Voting Rights Act. Judge Rodriguez asked if the Attorney General's office could guarantee that Republican lawmakers will not repeat abuses the court had criticized in the 2011 redistricting effort, such as, "hearings in hard-to-find locations with little notice" and "no maps visible for the public."

Since the League's mission is to encourage the informed and active participation in government, we are asking that the House Redistricting Committee make improvements in their current plan for Field Hearings. The League would like to emphasize specific actions that could be taken by the Committee:

1. The public should be notified of the Field Hearings at least a month in advance;
2. A public outreach campaign should be developed to notify the public of the Field Hearings. This outreach should include notifying local city and county officials in the area as well as local press outlets. Announcements should be made in both English and Spanish;
3. Hearings should be extended to the evening hours to accommodate people's work and school schedules;

4. Hearings in smaller towns should be relocated, since the population in these areas have not grown at the rates seen in the state's metroplexes and will unlikely need large adjustments in their district boundaries;
5. In addition to webcasting the hearings, we ask that maps and proposed plans be posted online as well.

These procedures would make the redistricting process more inclusive and equitable and would build public trust and confidence. We must work collectively to assure that our redistricting system does not fall short of what Americans are guaranteed by our Constitution.

Sincerely,

The League of Women Voters of Texas
1212 Guadalupe St., Suite 107
Austin, TX 78701

cc: Members of the Texas House Committee on Redistricting