

Redistricting Testimony Guide

Things to include about the process (Strongly Suggested):

1. 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. None of my testimony today should be used by the legislature to justify diminishing the ability of a minority group to elect the candidate of their choice or artificially distorting maps for racial or partisan purposes.
2. Check the hearing start time. If your hearing starts on a weekday in the morning, please comment about missing work or school in order to be there.
3. During the recent hearing to review evidence for the bail-in provision of Section 3 of the Voting Rights Act, U.S. District Judge Xavier Rodriguez criticized the 2011 redistricting effort for not having “maps visible for the public” to view. Therefore, we insist that a public hearing be held before any map (bill) is passed out of committee after the actual maps for the bill is drawn and insist that proposed maps be put on display for the public to view during those hearings.

How to define your community of interest:

A community of interest is a group of people in the same area that share social and economic interests and who should be kept together in a district so they can get fair and effective representation.

Examples of shared interests are those common to an urban area, a rural area, an industrial area, or an agricultural area, and those common to areas in which the people share similar living standards, use the same transportation facilities, have similar work opportunities, or have access to the same media of communication relevant to the election process.

In order to uphold the Voting Rights Act, you should prioritize keeping ethnic and/or language minority groups together (i.e. their neighborhood should be kept whole.)

More Examples:

- Political Lines (city limits, county lines, water districts, school district outer boundaries)
- Culture or history
- Transportation Corridors
- Weather
- Watershed
- Economical regions (industrial, agricultural, tech, army, etc)
- Recreational areas
- Housing
- Language
- Schools
- Healthcare
- Common Goal: reducing crime or increasing jobs

Why your community should be kept together:

You should describe why your community should be kept together in a district, which can also include why it would be harmful for your community to be split up into different districts. For example, if your community has been organizing to improve public safety or to improve public parks, you might highlight how your efforts would be helped by being represented by one representative rather than having to work with two (or more) representatives if your community is split.

Where is your community located:

You should tell the Committee where your community is located (county and/or city) and also describe its borders. You can do this by describing physical barriers like streets, rivers, military bases, or shopping malls, and also by describing legal barriers like city or county lines.

In addition, it is very helpful to provide the Commission with a map of where your community is located, including any landmarks or locations that are particularly important to your community. Some online software, such as Google Maps, provide a free and user-friendly method to produce such maps: www.Maps.Google.com.

There is also a free online districting tool that you can use: <https://districtr.org>

Check out the TX Legislative Council's website to view current districts:

dvr.capitol.texas.gov

When thinking about your testimony, it might be helpful to imagine how you would describe your community to a visitor from out of town. You might talk about the kind of people who live in your community, important issues, community centers, and your community's history.

Example Testimony:

I live in a unique area of Farmers Branch called Oak Knoll Valley. It is also a certified neighborhood council. The neighborhood is bounded between Highway 9 on the west and Sunnyside River on the east side. There are approximately 8,000 residents in Oak Knoll Valley and it is primarily a residential area with some areas zoned for commercial and mixed use especially along the river.

The languages spoken in Oak Knoll Valley are primarily English and Spanish with some residents speaking Vietnamese and Mandarin. While most residents go outside our community for shopping and employment, they tend to stay here for their socializing, religious activities and recreation. The Oak Knoll Regional Center provides a variety of activities and is a real hub of the community.

Across the river from Oak Knoll Valley is the community of River Glen which is similar to our community as it is primarily residential. We are in the same school district and the high school which Oak Knoll students attend is in River Glen. It would make sense that we would be included in the same legislative or Congressional district.

On the other side of Highway 9 is Gold City which is primarily an industrial and commercial area. Most of the residents live in multi-family apartment buildings and many of them are new to the area. Gold City is part of a different school district than Oak Knoll. While Gold City is in close proximity to Oak Knoll we have less in common than we do with River Glen.

Ranked Nonpartisan Criteria

1. Comply with the United States Constitution, including its equal population requirements.
 - Districts for the United States House of Representatives must achieve population equality as nearly as is practicable.
 - Districts for the election of members of the Texas Senate, the Texas House of Representatives, and the State Board of Education must have reasonably equal population with other districts for the same office.
2. Comply with the federal Voting Rights Act.
3. State House Districts must follow the County Line Rule:
 - A) Must use whole counties to the extent possible.
 - B) In larger counties, districts are drawn entirely within the county.
 - C) A county with sufficient population for multiple whole districts plus a fraction of another district must be divided into that many whole districts, with the excess population added to one or more contiguous counties to form an additional district.
4. Districts must be geographically contiguous.
5. Respect cities, communities of interest, and neighborhoods, where possible. A community of interest is a contiguous population that shares common social and economic interests that should be included within a single district for purposes of that population's effective and fair representation.
6. The place of residence of any incumbent or political candidate may not be considered in the creation of a map. Districts may not be drawn for the purpose of favoring or discriminating against an incumbent, political candidate, or political party.