

February 24, 2011

Citizens Redistricting Commission
1130 K Street, Suite 101
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Members of the Citizens Redistricting Commission:

We appreciate your efforts to move quickly in organizing the first ever independent Citizens Redistricting Commission in California. Along with many others, our organizations look forward to working in tandem with the Commission to ensure a successful redistricting process in 2011.

As you organize the business of the Commission, we know you are committed to establishing practices demonstrating that public input is valued and welcomed and that the Commission's approach to redistricting will be fair and free of partisan bias.

We strongly endorse this value and approach. The dividends in public trust to be reaped from immediate action in this regard are immense. Conversely, if these steps are delayed -- no matter what or how legitimate the reason -- the Commission is likely to have to work much harder to build that public trust, over a longer period of time.

At least in the beginning, the actions of the Commission will be compared to the way redistricting has been conducted in the past. This may not be fair but it is the reality of an extremely high-stakes policy area for candidates, incumbents, their supporters, and political parties. The old system is what people know, and they fear that backroom politics could somehow infiltrate or influence your work. The more transparency and dedication to public input there is in the process, the less these fears will be.

Californians supporting this reform want to be able to participate in the redistricting process in a timely way, from beginning to end. The ability of the public to participate was one of the fundamental principles behind Prop 11, and meaningful public participation stands to greatly enhance the work of the Commission. Because supporters want the results of the process to be fair, they also are sensitive to the possibility of one party or another gaining an unfair advantage in the Commission's work, for example through the possible influence of staffing. It is important for the Commission to demonstrate a staff hiring process that reflects the same principles that applied to the selection of the Commissioners, including diversity, impartiality, relevant skills and partisan balance.

Fortunately, there are a number of relatively simple steps the Commission can take to signal its commitment to transparency, openness to timely public input, and fairness. Below are some suggestions, which we also have shared with your staff:

In order to participate in the Commission's proceedings in time to influence its deliberations, people need to know the agenda ahead of time to prepare testimony, make travel arrangements, etc. They also need to know when and how they can submit comments:

1. Put timed agendas for all Commission meetings on the website in advance.
2. Indicate when comments will be taken, and provide opportunities for public input throughout the meetings, for example after each agenda item.
3. Try to adhere to the agenda schedule to the greatest degree possible, as appropriate.

4. Provide methods for people not able to attend in person to participate remotely. This should include taking maps and written testimony electronically, as well as testimony related to the issues you are deliberating currently.
5. Allow multiple opportunities at each meeting for those watching the live-stream to ask questions or give brief comments via email. This will give the Commission an opportunity to give real-time feedback and to clarify any misunderstandings before the meeting ends.
6. Post PowerPoint presentations/handouts that will be presented at the meeting on the website in advance of the meeting – or if not possible, shortly thereafter.
7. Post transcripts or video as soon as possible after each meeting, so people who missed it can know what happened. If budget constraints are a barrier to next-day posting, at least post a summary of the important decisions that were made.

In order to provide the public appropriate assurances that the staff of the commission are as carefully selected as the Commission has been, and to assure all aspects of the Commission's work, commands the confidence of all voters so that no one, irrespective of political affiliation, feels at a disadvantage during the crucial line drawing process, there should be significant transparency around the decision making process that informs hiring, and those hired should reflect reasonable political balance.

8. Prop 11 specifically requires the Commission to establish clear criteria for the hiring and removal of staff, communication protocols, and a code of conduct. Make this information publicly available.
9. Post staff bios on the website.
10. Consider including both Republicans and Democrats, and demographic diversity among staff, particularly map drawers or technical consultants and legal counsel, and ensure the Commission's decision making and communications processes relating to staffing are highly transparent.

As you know, Californians throughout the state are both excited about this new opportunity and intensely anxious that it truly represent a clear departure from the previous system in all of the ways that were intended by Prop 11. We also understand that you are working to improve the process along the above lines, and we appreciate your personal commitment to transparency and public involvement. We recognize that you would not have taken on this task if that were not the case.

Thank you for your attention to these critical issues.

Sincerely,

James Mayer
Executive Director
California Forward

Kathay Feng
Executive Director
Common Cause of California

Janis Hirohama
President
League of Women Voters of California

cc: Dan Claypool, Executive Director
California Citizens Redistricting Commission
Rob Wilcox, Communications Director
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