



March 18, 2011

Via Electronic Mail

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

Re: Public trust in Commission staffing decisions

Dear Members of the Citizens Redistricting Commission:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. This letter is in response to the March 16th letter from Ron Nehring, Chairman of the California Republican Party, calling for impartiality in the work of the Commission. In that letter Mr. Nehring wrote that California Forward and California Common Cause support the selection of multiple demographic and legal staff "to assure bipartisan balance... and to protect the reputation and integrity of the Commission and its redistricting work product." While California Forward fully agrees with Mr. Nehring's call for impartiality in the Commission's work, we have not nor have we ever intended to express a preference for one option over another with regard to how the Commission achieves this objective.

In our February 24th letter to the Commission, we said that no one, irrespective of political affiliation, should feel at a disadvantage during the crucial line drawing process. We also called for significant transparency around the decision making process that informs hiring, and said staff should reflect reasonable political balance. Elsewhere we stressed the importance of diversity, impartiality, and relevant skills. These qualifications can be achieved in a range of ways: through careful balance of staffing decisions overall, balance within a job classification, through the hiring of an individual with a strong track record of impartial professional conduct, or through a peer review process. The commissioners and senior staff must identify the most effective way to produce the necessary result and the proof will be in the pudding.

The reality is that many of the most experienced demographic consultants with redistricting-related experience have worked with, or been affiliated with, or have been hired by individuals with ties to Republicans or Democrats at some stage in their career. This alone should not be grounds for disqualification. What matters far more is the quality of a person's

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work and their record. In this case, we hope you will focus on whether candidates have the necessary skills to do the work you have identified, and whether they have significantly demonstrated the ability to conduct themselves impartially -- to provide confidence and reassurance to the public, in addition to helping produce maps widely recognized as fair.

We know the Commission understands these staffing decisions are critical to the success of the work you are preparing to undertake. We care about your choices because we want both the process and the results it yields to be recognized by Californians as an improvement over the old system. We also know that with only two applicants for the position of demographic consultant, it may not be possible to avoid frustrating a significant portion of observers with your final decision. For this reason it is all the more essential that the decision focus on applicants' skills, track record and the ability to be impartial, and that it be fully informed and made in full sunlight. Thank you again for providing us and other members of the public the chance to comment on this process.

Sincerely,



James P. Mayer
Executive Director