



c/o California Calls, 4801 Exposition Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90016

October 31, 2020

Citizens Redistricting Commission
720 Capitol Mall, Suite 260
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Citizens Redistricting Commissioners,

On behalf of the CA Black Census and Redistricting Hub, a coalition of 35 Black-led and Black-serving organizations throughout the State of California, I want to thank you for all of the hard work you've done thus far to set the stage for a successful and engaging statewide redistricting process. We appreciate all of the thoughtfulness you have put into your approach to community outreach, education, and engagement and encourage you to continue to do so as the process moves forward.

This letter is to address a conversation that commissioners had during your October 30, 2020 meeting. It was brought to our attention that during that meeting, the Black Census and Redistricting Hub was mentioned as a potential group to engage and address the commission concerning Black/African American communities. It was also brought to our attention that there was a suggestion that, because of time constraints, the commission might ask us to provide a short training video regarding our thoughts, insights, and recommendations for the commission, rather than appearing before the commission live, and that time would be scheduled later for the commission to discuss the training video at a commission meeting.

First, we want to thank you for the opportunity to address the commission and let you know that we are ready, willing, and able to appear before you to give you our thoughts and insights based on the years of work that our coalition has done in Black communities. That said, while we appreciate any opportunity to address the commission, we would like to request that our coalition be allowed to appear before the commission live so that we might be able to engage with commissioners directly and answer any deeper questions you may have, as other community groups have been afforded the opportunity to do over the past few weeks.

We believe that it is important to fully engage with our coalition for three important reasons: (1) the historical importance of the Black community in California; (2) the deep structural and systemic challenges and barriers African Americans face in being civically engaged; and (3) the value our coalition would bring to the commission's planning.

Historical Importance: As you may know, the Census Bureau estimated that there are over 3 million African Americans throughout the State of California, making up 8 percent of the State's total population. In 2010, California had the 5th largest Black population of any state in the nation, behind New York, Florida, Texas, and Georgia. The State's urban centers have significant Black populations. For instance, Oakland is 27% Black and 9% of Los Angeles is Black. Some exurbs like Antioch, Vallejo, Stockton, and cities in the Inland Empire have significant Black populations.

Throughout California's history, African Americans have made important contributions to the state in many ways. Blacks helped establish California's missions, mined gold in the 1800s, and were among the earliest contract farm laborers recruited to develop California's agricultural industry. African American

entrepreneurs (e.g. LA philanthropist Bridget “Biddy” Mason and LA architect Paul Williams) have provided a boost to the state’s economy throughout the years. The history of African Americans in California is rich in terms of leadership on civil rights and social justice as well. For example, the union for Pullman porters and maids was the first African American labor organization to receive a charter in the American Federation of Labor. The Black Panther Party was founded by students Huey Newton and Bobby Seale in Oakland.

Community Challenges: African Americans have been critical to making California what it is today despite the deep-rooted discrimination and injustices community members face. The disparities are numerous. African American children experience the highest rates of child poverty with 27% of children living in poverty. African American children are at increased risk for being below basic proficiency in math and reading. A staggering one in three African American men are expected to go to prison during their lifetimes.

The aftermath of the George Floyd killing brought attention to the deep structural and systemic issues facing the Black community, not only nationwide, but here in California, and this is, in part, due to the lack of representation in governmental roles, processes, and procedures. Ensuring that the commission understands this history and the structural barriers that exist is critical to engaging this community.

Value Our Coalition Brings: While we do not claim to represent all of Black California, we have worked hard to assemble a coalition of grassroots organizations, rooted in their communities, who have been engaging Black voters and residents together for the past 4 years, and many of them have experience with civic engagement in Black communities for decades. Specifically, members of our coalition conducted surveys around the 2020 census with over 11,000 community residents in Black communities in 2018, testing knowledge, awareness, opinions, and barriers that Black communities face in participating in the census. In addition, as the State’s official contractor for outreach to African Americans, our coalition conducted 3 civic engagement programs throughout 2019 and 2020, making over 330,000 phone calls and door knocks, contacting over 95,000 residents, and getting over 82,000 Black residents to commit to completing the census. In addition, through our My Black Counts strategic communications and digital marketing campaign, we reached over 2.1 million people in California, generating over 105,000 unique visits to the 2020 census website, and engaging nearly 10,000 subscribers to our campaign. The insights, experience, and wisdom that our team and coalition bring would be invaluable as you look to engage and ultimately draw lines that will impact Black communities, individuals, and families throughout the State.

In closing, we appreciate all the work you all are doing and welcome the opportunity to address the commission. It is our hope that we might engage the commission completely and fully so that you have a full understanding of the communities in which we work, the issues our communities face, and the challenges that exist. In addition, we think appearing before you live will give you an opportunity to interact and engage with us in asking deeper questions that a training video may not answer. We hope you see the value in that and invite us to properly engage the commission at a time that might work for you.

Thank you again for everything you are doing. If you should have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out to me directly at jwoodson@calicalls.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James E. Woodson III". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial 'J'.

James Woodson
Senior Policy Manager
CA Black Census and Redistricting Hub