



Committee on Redistricting, Texas House of Representatives

**The Honorable Todd Hunter, Chair
Honorable Representatives**

October 4, 2021

**Statement by Cyrus Reed, Conservation Director, Lone Star Chapter Sierra Club,
512-888-9411, cyrus.reed@sierraclub.org**

Thank you for the opportunity to offer some brief comments on the proposed map for state representatives released last Friday as HB 1. I am here on behalf of the Lone Star Chapter – which is the Texas Chapter of the Sierra Club. We are opposed to this initial version and would note that the map was released a mere four (4) days before the hearing, making it extremely difficult for the Sierra Club to notify our members, or the public in general to have time to consider making comments for a public hearing. The vast majority of interested stakeholders and the public have not had sufficient time to consider the impacts of these proposed districts. **Thus, we believe you have failed to provide Texans with an open, fair, and transparent process that affords time for proper deliberation and community input.**

The Sierra Club has approximately 30,000 members in the State of Texas. Sierrans in general care deeply about our state and planet's future, and care about the impacts and solutions to our climate catastrophes. They live throughout the state, tend to vote in all elections – more than 95 percent in presidential elections -- tend to get involved in local races supporting candidates and be civically engaged. While on the whole they tend to vote Democratic, we have members that are fiercely Democratic, partisan Republicans

and many independents. Sierra Club members care deeply about politics, policy and issues that are impacted by how you draw the lines.

I would ask that you have at least two additional public meetings on these proposed maps, and you continue to allow a portal for written testimony and continue to allow virtual testimony.

Why HB 1 Gets it All Wrong - Intentionally?

Texas is growing. Even with the difficulty of conducting a Census during a time of COVID that may have impacted our totals, the Census shows an exploding population where virtually every demographic is growing. The state has become more ethnically diverse as both in-state growth among particularly Latino and Asian communities, but also due to immigration from many nations. Our cities and suburban areas are growing, while there has been some loss of population in certain parts of rural and West Texas. In fact, about half of the state's growth over the last 10 years is among Latino populations and 95 percent of our growth came from People of Color -- Black, Latino and Asian.

The three areas of the state that have seen particularly high levels of pronounced growth have been in the DFW, and Houston-Fort Bend areas and in the areas surrounding Austin, such as Williamson and Hays Counties. We expected this committee to provide fairer maps in particular for the Central Texas, Dallas and Houston areas that better represent communities of interest.

We should not continue the Texas traditions of gerrymandering and map manipulation, where districts are either cracked in such a way that no congressperson, state representative or state senator is representing that community, or packed to unfairly tip the balance toward one political party. We have seen this in particular in Travis County, where we have five different congress people representing the county and four state senators cracking lines in Travis County.

Nevertheless, HB 1 as introduced continues this tradition. The proposed House map bears all the hallmarks of intentional racial discrimination.

In fact, the House map proposal reduces the strength of numerous districts that are currently electing candidates of choice. Under the new proposal, the map adds six more districts where white residents make up the majority of eligible voters while the number of Hispanic and Black districts would each drop by three (3).

According to the 2020 Census, 95% of population growth in Texas came from communities of color in suburban and urban communities. The proposed map does not reflect this fact.

Unfortunately, the State of Texas has a very long history of discriminating against voters of color in their district maps. The State has violated the Voting Rights Act or intentionally discriminated against voters of color in every decade for the past 50 years. Therefore, it is not appropriate to draw maps "color-blind". Racial data **must** be taken into consideration when drawing districts that uphold the Voting Rights Act.

No one has been harmed more by map manipulation and voter suppression than Black and Latino communities whose voices have been minimized at the ballot box and in Congress.

I ask that you work to end map manipulation and gerrymandering.

A case for the Environment as a Community of Interest

There is a case for a community of interest to be defined along more geographic and environmental lines. As an example, rather than drawing lines based solely on politics or people's race, communities of interest also include flood zones, hurricane intensity, and zones of pollution, industrial concentration and environmental justice.

In Travis County having two or three districts as opposed to five, and having them correspond to local geographies, and watersheds would be one way to approach newly drawn districts.

In the Houston area, Corpus area, and Dallas area in particular, making sure that there are defined districts that allow communities impacted by flooding, hurricanes and industrial areas with pollution to be well represented by congressional representatives. Shouldn't West Dallas with its myriad of flooding and pollution issues be better represented? Does it make sense that areas like Galveston and Friendswood are paired with very different communities that may not share their hurricane and flooding concerns? Should the Nueces County- San Patricio County areas be separated when they share particular concerns around industrialization, climate and flooding concerns?

Some Particular Issues

We would point to the way districts in particular in HB 1 have been drawn in counties like Tarrant, Denton and Collin Counties. These proposed districts make little sense and

do not keep flood plains or common communities together. Indeed they seem to be drawn in a particular way to lead to an outcome that will benefit one political party. Indeed, in Denton County, Districts like 63, 65 and 67 make little sense, while Collin County and Tarrant County districts are even more convoluted.

Similar situations can be seen in Fort Bend and Harris Counties, with Harris County having snake-like districts that seem to “pack-in” racial minorities while creating more Anglo districts. These districts cross watersheds and break up industrial communities and will not create communities of interest. Western Travis County has also been redrawn in a strange manner.

Texas will be best served where we have districts that can truly represent the interests of the people. That will also tend to lead to fairer less partisan districts that will lead to better bi-partisan policy that would be supported by most Texans.