



# **SIERRA CLUB**

## LONE STAR CHAPTER

### **Special Committee on Redistricting**

**The Honorable Joan Huffman, Chair  
Honorable Senators**

**From: Cyrus Reed, Conservation Director, Lone Star Chapter  
Sierra Club, [cyrus.reed@sierraclub.org](mailto:cyrus.reed@sierraclub.org), 512-740-4086**

**September 24th, 2021**

Thank you for the opportunity to offer some brief comments on the proposed draft maps of the State Senate for 2022. I am here on behalf of the Lone Star Chapter – which is the Texas Chapter of the Sierra Club. I know all of you senators, many of you for many years though this is the first time I have ever testified on a proposed map. Because these maps have the potential to shape the Texas Senate for the next 10 years, it is vitally important that lines are drawn fairly, create communities of interest, and do not unfairly favor one demographic or another and do not lock in districts that will never be competitive for either of the main political parties.

The Sierra Club has approximately 30,000 members in the State of Texas. While I do not personally know every Sierra Club member, I do know from our statistics that they tend to be people who are very involved in issues – particularly those involving clean air, clean water, land conservation – care deeply about our state and planet’s future, tend to 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 like first to thank Senator Huffman for giving the public at least 72 hours to examine the maps before these hearings were held, and for continuing to allow for written testimony. I do hope in addition to the hearings today and tomorrow, you will consider additional opportunities for in-person, virtual and written testimony.

I would also ask that you also provide at least 72-hours before any public hearings on congressional and state house maps.

### **Some obvious truths**

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.

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 expect 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 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.

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.

## **The Draft Senate Maps**

The Sierra Club is opposed to the proposed draft maps that are before us for State Senate Districts. That does not mean we oppose every drawn district, but we are most concerned by the changes that in our view split up or water down communities of interest in the Dallas-Fort Worth and Houston areas. In essence, you have made the districts less competitive and have drawn them in a way that will favor the Republican Party and dilute the power of minority voices. In earlier pronouncements, we made it clear that one factor that might assist you in redrawing lines would be to consider environmental factors, including industrial areas, flood or hurricane zones, watersheds or similar topographies (i.e. hill country or blackland prairies). We do not believe the present maps -- and particularly in Dallas Fort Worth and Houston - would meet these environmental “communities of interest.”

We do recognize that some improvements, including the consolidation of Senate District 14 within Travis County does represent some progress.

### **A few particular egregious cases**

We are very concerned by the splitting up of growing communities like Fort Bend County between proposed districts 7, 17 and 18,, and would note that Senator Huffman’s own district contorts in very strange ways, covering very different parts of the state. Again we would support keeping communities together, particularly those that share watersheds and flood zones.

We are most concerned, however, by the maps in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, which seems purposefully designed to dilute the voting power of the growing urbanized and suburban core. Most egregious is the redrawing of Senate District 10, which now includes more rural counties like Parker and Johnson, but also the redrawing of Senate District 8, 12 and Senate District 30 which seems to purposefully dilute the voting power of Denton County. We would also note the way the newly proposed District 22 now creates a tentacle up into Tarrant County, which has little to do with the rest of the proposed district.

Again, we believe the Special Committee should reconsider the Dallas-Fort Worth area, better define communities of interest, and consider factors such as watersheds, and industrial concentration when drawing these districts.

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.