



SIERRA CLUB

LONE STAR CHAPTER

Comments Against Unfair SB 375 Senate Redistricting Maps

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Dear Chair and Members of the Special Committee on Redistricting,

The maps established under SB 4 (during a special legislative session in 2021) – which are now being proposed to be codified under SB 375 – will shape the Texas Senate for the next 10 years. It is vitally important that lines are drawn fairly, create communities of interest, 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. We believe that the maps have been drawn in a way that assures that certain districts are not competitive and will assure the dominance of one party over the other. The recent elections resulted in 19 seats for the Republicans and 12 for the Democrats, which is not reflective of the split in Texas based on the elections for state office. Many of the districts are drawn in a way that is unfair to voters.

The Sierra Club has approximately 30,000 members in the State of Texas. We have members who 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.

Maps Don't Represent Community Demographics

Texas is growing. The state has become more ethnically diverse from in-state growth among our Latino and Asian communities as well as immigration from many nations. Our cities and suburban areas are growing, while there has been some loss of population in 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 believe that the maps approved by the Legislature last year do not provide fair maps in particular for the Central Texas, Dallas and Houston areas in representing communities of interest.

We should not be continuing 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 they are packed to unfairly tip the balance toward one political party. 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.

Environmental Communities of Interest Goal is Unmet

The Sierra Club is opposed to the approved maps that are before us for state Senate districts. We are most concerned by the changes that split up or water down communities of interest in the DFW and Houston areas. 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 in redrawing lines you should consider environmental factors, including industrial areas, flood or hurricane zones, watersheds or similar topographies (i.e. Hill Country or Blackland Prairie). We do not believe the present maps meet these environmental “communities of interest.” We do recognize some improvements, including the consolidation of Senate District 14 within Travis County.

Egregious Cases

We remain concerned by the splitting of growing communities like Fort Bend County between districts 7, 17, and 18, and note that Senator Huffman’s district contorts in very strange ways. We support keeping communities together, particularly those sharing watersheds and flood zones.

We are most concerned, however, by the maps in the DFW area, which seem purposefully designed to dilute the voting power of the growing urbanized and suburban core. Most egregious is new Senate District 10, which now includes more rural counties like Parker and Johnson, and also the newly drawn districts 8, 12, and 30, which seem 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 DFW area, better define communities of interest, and consider factors such as watersheds and industrial concentration.

Fairer Districts = Better Policy and Cooperation

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.