

January 18, 2022

**Testimony on SJ 2 & HJ 2
Legislative Districting Plan of 2022
Joint - House Rules & Executive Nominations**

Position: Information

Common Cause Maryland writes to provide informational testimony on SJ 2 and HJ 2 which outlines a plan to redraw the boundaries of our legislative voting districts.

While we thank the Maryland General Assembly, specifically, the Legislative Redistricting Advisory Commission (LRAC), for working to improve the process—we are concerned that the same level of transparency and access that was provided during congressional redistricting was not maintained when working on this legislative map proposal.

We appreciate that the legislative proposal was released in an interactive format with the ShapeFiles needed for analysis, but the public did not have adequate time to provide any meaningful input. The initial proposal was released during the holiday, and only a day in advance of the deadline for public testimony. We can assume that most members of public did not have enough time to review and provide feedback, if they were even aware at all.

We continue to be concerned by the overall redistricting process, as it does not build public confidence and trust. If not improved, the accountability between our elected officials and their constituents will grow even more fragmented, and voters will feel the elections are rigged – that elected officials are choosing their voters. We hope the General Assembly will work with our partners and us over the next decade to improve the next redistricting process. Common Cause also continues to fight for a national solution.

As the General Assembly works to adopt a legislative plan, we urge members to take the following principles into consideration:

- **Compliance with the letter and spirit of the federal Voting Rights Act and its prohibition of vote dilution and of retrogression:** preserve extant remedial districts under the Voting Rights Act and create new opportunity districts consistent with growth in relevant populations. Moreover, the requirements of the Voting Rights Act should be viewed as a floor, and not a ceiling, with respect to the voting rights of voters of color in redistricting. Make it a priority to exercise considerable latitude within the law to create coalition and/or influence districts for voters of color where the creation of Voting Rights Act-compliant opportunity districts, in which voters of color comprise the majority of the voting-age population in a district, is not possible.
- **Consideration of communities of interest:** maintaining identified communities of interest intact in redistricting maps should be second only to compliance with the United States Constitution and the federal Voting Rights Act as a consideration in redistricting.
- **Transparency:** timely disclosure as changes, if any, are made to the plan being voted upon to allow ample opportunity for public review and input before adoption. The legislative process must also remain open and accessible to the public in all but the most limited of circumstances.
- **Public input:** we urge members of the General Assembly to review testimony and maps that have been submitted by the public, paying close attention to testimony that highlights communities that want to be kept together.

We urge the General Assembly quickly adopt a legislative districting plan. Swift action will ensure the State and local boards of elections have ample time to prepare for the primary election.

Our legislative district lines should be drawn to reflect the interests of the people of Maryland, not politicians. We hope that will be achieved in SJ 2/ HJ 2.

