

Public field hearings are a vital process in the redistricting efforts to ensure fairness and transparency.

Thank you for participating in a public hearing so that we can help put pressure on politicians to take common sense measures to draw fair maps!

In this worksheet you will find:

1. Recommendations for a Fair and Open Process
2. Sample of a draft testimony
3. A worksheet to help you draft your own testimony

Recommendations for a Fair & Transparent Process

Recommendation: Hold public hearings with public testimony after census data is released, and on any proposed maps after they have been drawn but before they pass through Committee. Provide adequate notice to the public about hearings and an opportunity to review the maps before the hearing.

Explanation: Because of the timing of when census data is available, it is not possible to draw maps until the legislative session is already underway. In past cycles, the legislature has not held hearings on maps after they have actually been drawn. Any fair and open process should at the very least include the ability for public comment before a map is passed to a final vote of the legislature.

Recommendation: Allow enough time at hearings for other legislators and the public to introduce alternative map suggestions.

Explanation: To demonstrate any problems with proposed maps, it will be necessary to show that there are better alternatives that can be adopted. The redistricting committees are in control of how much and what type of testimony can be presented at a public hearing. The committees need to ensure that there is sufficient time and technical capability for alternative proposals to be examined which can help demonstrate flaws in the proposed maps.

Recommendation: Explain how the maps were drawn, and why there was any deviation from traditional redistricting principles, including county and precinct splits and population deviations. Include in the explanation an analysis of how these maps affect the ability of historically disenfranchised groups to elect candidates.

Explanation: Although sometimes it is necessary to draw complicated districts in order to make fair and legal maps, deviating from traditional principles can also be an indication that unfair manipulation is going on. A legislator who wishes to have a map adopted should be willing to explain why they made the choices they did and what process they followed in drawing their maps. Additionally, given Texas's history of racial discrimination and Voting Rights Act violations, a legislator should include with any map

an explanation of how their map affects the ability of minority communities to elect candidates of their choice.

Recommendation: Don't look at partisan data (data showing which political party people vote for) while drawing maps.

Explanation: Manipulating maps to artificially distort political power undermines the principle of a representative government. The government should represent a fair cross-section of society and partisan manipulation makes that impossible.

Recommendation: Make all communications open regarding proposed maps.

Explanation: Legislators can try to hide behind various exceptions to the Public Information Act to shield their communications from the public. Given the history of discriminatory redistricting and the federal court's warning to engage in a fair and open process, legislative privilege should not be invoked when it comes to drawing maps. Any politician that wishes to have their map considered should be fully open and transparent about how and why they created their maps.

Sample Testimony

Hello, my name is ____, and I am testifying on why the 2021 redistricting process needs to be fair and transparent.

How districts are drawn affects every political issue, from the economy to healthcare to public education. If politicians are elected from districts that don't reflect the population, you end up with situations where politicians support policies that the vast majority of people oppose, or they won't support policies that the vast majority of people support. When politicians manipulate maps for personal or political gain, it prevents residents like me from having our voices heard on all of these policies that affect us.

Purposefully breaking up communities takes away the community's ability to come together and advocate for important issues. For example, here in Travis County we are artificially broken up into 6 congressional districts extending way off in every direction. This means that no congressperson is fully committed to listening to our concerns. I care about issues like affordable housing, gun control, and urban infrastructure. When maps are unfairly rigged, you end up seeing a legislature that represents special interests and politicians, instead of representing the people.

In the past, state politicians have made the redistricting process worse by doing everything behind closed doors, discriminating against minority communities, and not giving the public any chance to comment on what is happening.

In order for our democracy to function, the public needs to have a voice in the process. Therefore, I am asking that this Committee commit to holding a public hearing with public testimony on any maps before they are passed. They must give the public sufficient notice and capability to review the maps before this hearing. I also want the legislators who draw the maps to explain why they chose to draw them the way they did, and to not hide any communications they have had regarding drawing the maps.

In order to build trust that the maps have not been unfairly manipulated, I ask that the legislature doesn't look at partisanship when coming up with maps. This is an opportunity for the Texas Legislature to finally get this process right and avoid wasting millions of taxpayer dollars and years on lawsuits, so I hope that you will take this testimony to heart. Thank you for taking the time to listen to me today.

Worksheet for drafting your own testimony

Introduce yourself.

State your name, State the organization that you are representing (if any), and state the topic you will be discussing.

Put into your own words how map manipulation hurts communities

This can be on a large scale by distorting the makeup of the entire legislature, or it can be on a local scale by breaking up communities and placing them with faraway communities that share few social and economic interests with them.

Make recommendations to improve the process

You can echo the recommendations above, and add other things you would like to see out of the process.

Thank the Committee