
Commission Meeting

of

NEW JERSEY REDISTRICTING COMMISSION

“Testimony from the public on the establishment of Congressional districts in New Jersey that will be in effect for the next 10 years”

LOCATION: Meeting via Zoom

DATE: October 23, 2021
10:00 a.m.

MEMBERS OF COMMISSION PRESENT:

Honorable John E. Wallace, Jr., Commission Chair
Janice Campbell Fuller, Democratic Delegation Chair
Douglas J. Steinhardt, Esq., Republican Delegation Chair
Michele Albano
Jeanne Dovgala Ashmore
Iris Michelle Delgado
Mark Duffy
Senator Vin Gopal
Stephanie Lagos
Mark LoGrippe
Jeffrey L. Nash, Esq.
Lynda Pagliughi
Dana L. Redd



ALSO PRESENT:

Raysa Martinez Kruger
Commission Secretary
Office of Legislative Services

Roshard Williams
Jessica Oestreicher
Office of Legislative Services
Commission Aides

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Meeting Transcribed by
The Office of Legislative Services, Public Information Office,
Hearing Unit, State House Annex, PO 068, Trenton, New Jersey

DEMOCRATIC MEMBERS

Janice Fuller
Delegation Chair

Iris Delgado
Vin Gopal
Stephanie Lagos
Jeff Nash
Dana Redd



REPUBLICAN MEMBERS

Doug Steinhardt
Delegation Chair

Michele Albano
Jeanne Ashmore
Mark Duffy
Mark LoGrippto
Lynda Pagliughi

NEW JERSEY CONGRESSIONAL
REDISTRICTING COMMISSION

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John E. Wallace, Jr.
Chair

REDISTRICTING COMMISSION NOTICE

TO: MEMBERS OF THE REDISTRICTING COMMISSION

FROM: JOHN E. WALLACE, JR. – CHAIR

SUBJECT: **REDISTRICTING COMMISSION MEETING - OCTOBER 23, 2021**

The public may address comments and questions to Raysa Martinez Kruger, Commission Secretary, or make scheduling inquiries to Sophie Love, Secretary, at (609)847-3890 or email: OLSAideREDC@njleg.org. Written and electronic comments, questions and testimony submitted to the Commission by the public, as well as recordings and transcripts, if any, of oral testimony, are government records and will be available to the public upon request.

The Redistricting Commission will meet remotely via Zoom on Saturday, October 23, 2021 at 10:00 AM.

The Commission will take oral testimony from members of the public on the establishment of congressional districts in New Jersey that will be in effect for the next 10 years.

Members of the public may view the proceedings via the New Jersey Legislature home page at <https://www.njleg.state.nj.us/>.

Those wishing to testify must register online at <https://www.njleg.state.nj.us/>. Select October 23 on the calendar and click on Redistricting Commission for the registration link. Registrations must be received by Friday, October 22, 2021 at 3:00 PM. Upon successful registration, you will receive an email confirming receipt. At a later date, you will receive another email with instructions for testifying. To ensure that all who wish to testify can do so, the Chair may limit public testimony to 5 minutes or more per person.

You may also submit written testimony instead of, or in addition to, oral testimony by email to OLSAideREDC@njleg.org by Friday, October 22, 2021 at 3:00PM. Written testimony will be included in the Commission's record and distributed to all Commission members.

If you require language translation services to testify, please contact the Office of Legislative Services at (609) 847-3890 to discuss and arrange for translation services in advance of the meeting.

(OVER)

Issued 10/15/21

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JOHN E. WALLACE, JR. (Chair): Good morning, everyone, my name is John Wallace and I want to welcome to you to the first public hearing of the Redistricting Commission. It is a virtual hearing, and hopefully we will not have any more technical difficulties other than what I have previously had; please forgive me.

But the purpose of today's hearing is to hear from you. We want to receive your views on what the redistricting map should look like. We will hear from those citizens who requested to speak today.

Before we hear from the speakers, I would ask that our secretary would please call the roll.

MS. MARTINEZ KRUGER: Certainly, Chair Wallace.
Commissioner Steinhardt.

MR. DOUGLAS J. STEINHARDT (Delegation Chair): Here.

MS. MARTINEZ KRUGER: Commissioner Albano.

MS. ALBANO: Here.

MS. MARTINEZ KRUGER: Commissioner Ashmore.

MS. ASHMORE: Here.

MS. MARTINEZ KRUGER: Commissioner Fuller.

MS. JANICE FULLER (Delegation Chair): Here.

MS. MARTINEZ KRUGER: Commissioner Delgado.

MS. DELGADO: Present.

MS. MARTINEZ KRUGER: Commissioner Duffy.

MR. DUFFY: Here.

MS. MARTINEZ KRUGER: Commissioner Lagos.

MS. LAGOS: Here.

MS. MARTINEZ KRUGER: Commissioner LoGrippe.

MR. LoGRIPPO: Here.

MS. MARTINEZ KRUGER: Commissioner Nash.

MR. NASH: Here.

MS. MARTINEZ KRUGER: Commissioner Pagliughi. (no response)

She's here.

Commissioner Redd.

MS. REDD: Here.

MS. MARTINEZ KRUGER: Commissioner Gopal will be in later.

And Chair Wallace.

MR. WALLACE: Here. Thank you, Madam Secretary.

After today's hearing, our next hearing will be an in-person hearing on Tuesday, October 26, at 6 p.m. at the Ocean County Community College, Gateway Building, Room 104, 1 College Drive in Toms River.

All hearings and the locations can be found on the Commission website at www.njredistrictingcommission.org.

We will then hold our third hearing on Saturday, October 30, at 10 a.m., which will be another virtual hearing.

Before I call our first speaker up, is there anyone on the Commission who would like to make a comment at this time?

MR. STEINHARDT: Chairwoman, do you want to defer to you first?

MS. FULLER: Thank you, Chairman Steinhardt, I appreciate that. Good morning, everyone.

MR. WALLACE: Good morning.

MS. FULLER: I am Janice Fuller-- Good morning, Justice Wallace, thank you for that. And thank you to OLS and the team who has made this morning's virtual meeting possible, and for all the work they've done up to this point.

I am Janice Fuller, the Chair of the Democratic Commissioners to the Congressional Redistricting Committee. We are happy to be here today. We see public input in the redistricting process as so critical, and why we as a group are listing an unprecedented number of public hearings to try to elicit as much public input as we possibly can, through virtual meetings and in-person meetings, and encourage the public to participate in this process; and also through the website, where they can provide comments, testimony, and submit maps as well.

My colleagues have been introduced: Ms. Delgado, Ms. Lagos, Commissioner Nash, Mayor Redd; and Senator Gopal will be joining us shortly. We look forward to working with Justice Wallace and all of the Commissioners to come up with a fair and representative map for the people of New Jersey. Thank you.

MR. WALLACE: Thank you.

MR. STEINHARDT: Chairwoman, thanks.

Yes, sir, good morning. First of all, I just want to welcome everyone in attendance; my name is Doug Steinhardt, and I have the privilege of serving as Chairman of the Republican Delegation to the Commission. I want to thank Chairman Wallace, Chairwoman Fuller, and to say we are excited to work alongside the committed group of public servants in New Jersey, leaders from both sides of the aisle. The rest of our team -- Michele Albano, Jeanne Ashmore, Lynda Pagliughi, Mark Duffy, and Mark LoGrippo

-- round out the Republican team. As we said, first committed to a transparent process; second, proud to have more than double the number of public hearings together with Chairwoman Fuller on the Democratic team. We're looking forward to listening, and I think more important, learning from members of the public during this process.

I am finally convinced that increased engagement from the state's grassroots will genuinely improve the Commission's ability to achieve a map that is responsive to the will of the State's voters, responsive and representative of the makeup of New Jersey's demographics.

So I am grateful for this opportunity to be part of this team and look forward to the succeeding ten meetings.

Chairman, thank you.

MR. WALLACE: All right, thank you very much for those comments. Our first speaker is Mayor Wahler, who will be followed by Marley, Hensely, Lurinsky, and Glynn. I will give the additional four or five following them.

At this time, I would like if Mayor Wahler would come on and give us his comments.

MAYOR BRIAN C. WAHLER: Thank you, Commissioner Wallace. My name is Brian Wahler, the Mayor of Piscataway Township. I am in my 21st year as Mayor of the town; also I am the past President of the New Jersey Conference of Mayors and the New Jersey League of Municipalities, as well as an active participant with the United States Conference of Mayors, which helps advocate for cities and towns pertaining to Federal legislation in the United States.

I just want to make three quick points. Piscataway is the eighth most diverse town in the State. What we do in the Township is bring people from all walks of life together. Piscataway needs to stay whole in the upcoming redistricting. As we work to unite communities, please do not divide a town between districts.

Point two, Rutgers University is the academic jewel of our State. The main campus is shared amongst Piscataway, New Brunswick, and Highland Park. Rutgers, in these three towns, are a community of interests which should remain in the same congressional district.

Point three, Frank Pallone has represented Piscataway since 1993. He knows the diversity of our township and is well-respected by all. He has supported the growth of Rutgers University into a world-class institution. His knowledge is deep, and his care is profound. He has generations of relationships here in Middlesex County, and the continuity of representation in our Township is very important to our residents, as well as Middlesex County as a whole.

And I want to thank the Commission members for allowing me a minute or so to give these talking points, and hopefully you'll do the right thing at the end of the process there. And the good news is it only comes once every 10 years.

Thank you Chairman Wallace.

MR. WALLACE: All right. Thank you, sir, for your comments. Our next speaker is Marcia Marley. Is Ms. Marley available?

MARCIA MARLEY: Yes, I'm here. Can you hear me?

MR. WALLACE: Yes, we can, thank you. Go ahead.

MS. MARLEY: All right. I first want to thank the Commission for allowing me to speak about the importance of redistricting to our democratic process. The redistricting process should be transparent, and I commend the Commission for creating so many public hearings and opportunities to receive input. We hope that transparency will continue with the publication of the maps, and the provision for public comments on the map.

I'm here today on behalf of BlueWaveNJ to speak about how to measure and ensure fairness in a redistricting map. At the end of my testimony, I will also address the importance of women among our congressional delegations. There are many principles that should be used to draw district lines in addition to the equal population requirement required at the Federal level. These include compactness, connectedness, preservation of political districts, and protection of communities of interest and color and their representation. These principles, however, take us only so far and are not sufficient to ensure that a map is fair.

Fairness is, of course inimical to racial and partisan gerrymandering. And independent commissions help, but there is much more to fairness. What I want to draw the Commission's attention to today is that a fair amount of New Jersey must take into account where we came from -- the State's redistricting history, not just the current configuration of seats. And this is important because, to my knowledge, most measures of fairness are static. They just look at the current or most recent data.

Because of its relevance to New Jersey, I want to discuss one static measure of fairness. This is the idea that a party's share of seats should correspond to its share in the statewide popular vote. For example, if a party

has 66 percent of all votes cast in a recent election, 12 districts should be configured so that the party is likely to win 8 of them. This “minimize the deviation from proportional representation” principle sounds straightforward and desirable, but in practice it is extremely misleading. When you see a lopsided result, it could be because districts were substantially gerrymandered through cracking and packing communities; or it could be just that the majority party did a good job of winning over swing districts. The simple measure will not tell you which is the case. You need to look at history.

For example, a number of people have suggested that since the New Jersey Presidential split is usually around 57 percent for Democrat, and the New Jersey Congressional ratio is now 83 percent in favor of Democrats, then too, it would only be fair to balance the scales in 2022 by using a more Republican map, or a compromised map. Well, we have been using a Republican-leaning map for the last decade. In 2012, that gerrymandered map gave us an even split, six Republicans, six Democrat, even though Obama won the State with 58 percent.

The difference between the current 10-to-2 Democrat-Republican split compared to the 6-6 elected in 2012 is attributed to many factors, including increased suburban anti-Trump voters among Independents, as well as the relative popularity of the Democratic candidates. For an example: even though Trump won New Jersey District 3 by a narrow margin, Representative Kim won his Congressional seat by 8 percent points in 2020, as voters split their ticket.

Representative Sherrill was also popular among Republicans in 2018, and won by 15 points. For that election, I saw a few lawn signs that had “Vote Trump” and “Mikie” signs side by side. However, the 2018 gains

did not mean that the district was not competitive, and in 2020 Sherrill's margin was more in line with other New Jersey competitive districts.

Another factor in Democratic success in 2018 and 2020 was tremendous grassroots efforts in the smaller districts. However, this one factor-- Sorry. The one factor that did not contribute to the turnover in seats was a district map that favored Democrats -- just the opposite. Democrats gained seats in spite of a map that favored Republicans, and these gains could easily be reversed in the next election.

Here are two alternative measures of fairness: packing and competitiveness. They demonstrate clearly how New Jersey's current map favors Republicans. Using these measures, there are five packed Democrat districts, there are five competitive districts -- matched by few other states. Each party has one safe district making twelve. I define a packed district as one where the candidate receives more than 60 percent of the vote over several recent elections. From an efficiency point of view, votes in excess of 60 percent are wasted. There are five districts where Democrats have been packed. They are 1, 8, 9, 10, and 12. Two of these packed districts voted 83 percent and 74 percent in favor of the Democratic candidate in 2020, and they are also two of the districts that had the most significant increase in population. Population gains must be shared with other districts. In contrast, the only safe Republican district -- 4 -- was won with 59.9 percent of the vote in 2020.

Not all concentration of voters is negative. Some clustering may be desirable to meet other principles, such as preservation of communities and racial equity -- and I strongly believe these principles should override efficiency arguments. However, there is a limit to the amount of crowding

required to ensure representation. Additional packing in these districts just reduces voters' power.

Now, let's talk about competitive districts. You might reasonably spot that New Jersey Republicans have packed into districts they've won, just as Democrats are in theirs. However, the flip side to there being so many packed Democratic districts in New Jersey is the record number of competitive districts compared to any other majority Democratic state. The working definition of "competitive" uses the value of Cook's Partisan Voting Index (PVI) over several years being 0 and +6 for either party.

New Jersey has five competitive districts, 42 percent of the total. There is a reason why incumbents continue to point out that control of the House runs through New Jersey -- because we are the only Democratic state with so many competitive districts. When these districts were redistricted last -- for the 2012 election -- all five seats were held by Republicans, and also leaned Republican with the PVI's of between 0 to R +6, and still generally lean Republican. Only one, the 7th, is now rated D+1, well within the margin of error.

The bottom line is that the 2022 redistricting process is starting with districts that are clearly to Republicans' advantage, as indicated by the number of competitive districts compared to other states -- Democratic states -- or the number of Democratic packed districts compared to Republican districts. Given the population increase in the Democratic northern counties, there is an added urgency for the new map to reflect and provide a voice for New Jersey's increasingly diverse population. Further packing already safe

Democratic districts will only compound historical partisan gerrymandering, and reduce voter power.

In contrast, a good map will be one that protects minority communities from being cracked apart or packed into the minimum number of districts possible; will empower communities of color to elect candidates of their choice to preserve political districts where possible; will reflect the will of the elector. While competitiveness is a good thing and helps our democracy thrive, a good map should not be drawn to protect any party -- Democrat or Republican -- just because that party has not had recent electoral success.

In closing, I would like to say a few words about the importance of maintaining and increasing women representatives, a cause I am passionate about. We know from experience in research what a difference women in elected office make with respect to policy and decision making on childcare, employment, wage discrimination and health care, to name only a few issues. We also know the importance that elected women play as role models for other women running for elected office and engaging more women in the process, which is desperately needed in the Garden State.

In the entire history of New Jersey, there has been 316 individuals elected to the House -- I'll say that again, 316 -- and around 350 elected to the House and Senate. Only seven of these have been women, and that includes the current two. Our delegation has 2 women out of 14 House and Senate representatives, and New Jersey has never elected a woman Senator. This is unacceptable. Commission members, I understand that this is not a question of drawing maps that favor one gender, though we are roughly 50 percent of the population. But I'm asking you to recognize how

important our two remarkable women representatives are to the well-being of families and all residents. We need to support them.

Thank you so much for your time.

MR. WALLACE: Thank you very much for your comments, we'll certainly consider them.

Our next witness is Philip Hensley. Mr. Hensley.

PHILIP HENSLEY: Good morning. Chairman Wallace, delegation Chair--

MR. WALLACE: Good morning--

MR. HENSLEY: Fuller, and Steinhardt, all the members of the Commission, thank you for this opportunity to present testimony.

My name is Philip Hensley, and I am here on behalf of the League of Women Voters of New Jersey and the Fair Districts New Jersey coalition. The Fair Districts coalition advocates for a transparent and inclusive redistricting process. We believe New Jerseyans deserve a map-making process that prioritizes public input, a process that ensures all our communities have an equal opportunity to participate in our democracy.

I would like to begin by thanking the Commission for holding this hearing today, and the upcoming hearings on October 26 and October 30. The Commission's decision to hold at least 10 public hearings represents a substantial improvement over the practice of a decade ago. However, there are still improvements that can and should be made to facilitate public participation in these hearings. A transparent and public process requires not only that the Commission hold public hearings, but that those hearings are truly accessible to all.

We strongly urge the Commission to make use of all the resources available to it to make its website more accessible and user-friendly. The Commission's registration form is unnecessarily confusing, as it is designed for legislative hearings. The Commission should make it easier for the public to submit written testimony by creating a submission form directly on its website. The website should also allow members of the public to submit maps, including maps of Congressional districts, maps for the State as a whole, and maps depicting communities of interest.

Excellent models for such a site can be seen on the California Citizens Redistricting Commissions *drawmycacommunity.org* site; and on the website of the Colorado Independent Redistricting Commission. The Commission could also improve public awareness of these hearings by livestreaming hearings directly on social media. The Commission should make recordings and transcripts of each meeting available on its website within 24 hours.

Making the redistricting process accessible to all New Jerseyans also requires that the Commission provide translation services for the languages commonly spoken in our State. The Commission should provide translations for written materials, including the Commission's website, hearing notices, and transcripts. Translations should be provided in the languages currently provided by the New Jersey Division of Elections for voter registration materials. Those are Arabic, Portuguese, Spanish, Gujarati, Creole, Hindi, Korean, Punjabi, and Chinese; as well as a few additional languages which are commonly spoken in parts of the State: Tagalog, Polish, Bengali, Urdu, Vietnamese, and Nepali.

Fair Districts New Jersey also advocates for greater transparency throughout the entire redistricting process. The Commission should publicly release preliminary maps in advance of certification, and then hold hearings on the proposed maps to give the public the opportunity to weigh in before a final vote. The Commission should also publish a written report, justifying map-making decisions.

In addition to calling for a transparent and a public process, Fair Districts New Jersey coalition advocates that redistricting should be conducted in accordance with clear, non-partisan line-drawing standards. Specifically, Commissioners should follow three criteria when drawing districts.

First, a racial equity criterion reinforcing the principles of the Voting Rights Act. That ensures that New Jersey's communities of color have an equal opportunity to participate in the political process. Second, redistricting should preserve communities of interest to the greatest extent possible. And third, an anti-gerrymandering principle that district plans should not favor or disfavor any office holder, candidate, or political party.

The 2020 Census demonstrated the important of our first criterion, racial equity. The census results show that New Jersey is becoming more diverse. In particular, Latino populations grew by 29 percent, while Asian populations grew by 31 percent. New congressional districts should be drawn that reflect that New Jersey's population growth has been concentrated among New Jersey's communities of color.

It is also vital that New Jersey's congressional districts keep communities of interest together. Communities of interest can consist of various shared cultural, ethnic, linguistic, or economic ties. The Commission

should keep communities together and minimize the number of county and municipal splits. Splitting counties, municipalities, and school districts impairs their ability to advocate for their shared interests.

I want to thank Chairman Wallace, Commissioners, and their staff for their work organizing today's hearing. Fair Districts New Jersey will provide additional testimony at future hearings to discuss specific proposals about how the Commission can redraw congressional districts.

Thank you for your time.

MR. WALLACE: Thank you, Mr. Hensley.

And now our next speaker is Mark Lurinsky.

MARK LURINSKY: Thank you, Judge Wallace. Thank you to the Redistricting Commission for this opportunity to speak. I believe that the right of the public to have meaningful input in the redistricting process is essential to democracy. I'll say candidly that my preference would be that the Commission process for redistricting in New Jersey should evolve into a non-partisan commission, as a number of states have done. But I do recognize that under our State's Constitution, it is still a partisan process with a tie-breaking vote.

I hope the Commission will continue down the path of maximum transparency, and I also hope that before the public comment period ends, we voters will also have the chance to see any proposed maps and weigh in on them, which would greatly improve the effectiveness of our input.

I grew up in Union County, and I've lived in Montclair in Essex County for the last 30 years. My home was placed in the 10th Congressional District during the 2011 redistricting, while neighbors eight blocks away were assigned to the 11th Congressional District. I want to mention that I am in

an interracial family, so the effective empowerment of our minority citizens in the electoral process is very important to me. I think this can best be done by preserving the districts which currently have a plurality or majority of our Black, Hispanic, and other minority citizens, while also allowing more of our minority citizens to exercise greater voting power in districts where they are not currently so concentrated.

To say a relevant bit about Montclair -- when my daughter was small, my wife and I made a conscious decision to live here because of the town's reputation for diversity. One thing this means is that our town has adopted a magnet school system as a remedy to the way segregated housing patterns affect the schools. Because our kids all attend the same schools now, regardless of where in town we live, this common interest relates to the whole town. This is a reason why I feel the reunification of our community within the same congressional district would make sense, if it is possible.

A major headline of the just published 2020 Census data was that North Jersey urban areas have seen the largest amount of growth in our State in the last 10 years, both in absolute and relative terms. Now the 8th Congressional District is over the desired target, for substantially equal populations for districts, by about 47,000 residents. And the 10th Congressional District is over the target population by about 42,000. It would seem reasonable to me to allow these excess numbers of residents to be reassigned to the adjoining districts, whose growth has not kept pace.

In terms of the 10th Congressional District, the residents above the target population amount could be reassigned to the directly adjacent 11th and 7th Districts. This would be conservative in the sense that it doesn't overly disrupt the districts that residents are now familiar with, and

it would also avoid drawing more irregular district lines. It could also mean reuniting the voters of my town of Montclair in a fully -- fully within one district, the 11th, which as I mentioned would benefit us.

Union Township in Union County -- which is also split between two districts, the 10th and the 7th now -- could be united within the 7th Congressional District as well. I note that our current 10th Congressional District Democratic representative has regularly received 80 to 90 percent of the vote in several elections, and one reelection in 2020, with an astounding 70 percent margin. The changes I am suggesting to the 10th wouldn't so much alter the political composition of the 10th District, as a heavily Democratic district with strong voice from minority empowerment, as it would allow a number of voters who are currently situated within the 10th to exercise their voting rights in a way that would be more impactful.

Looking at the other side of the political map, I would say that any attempt to use redistricting to engineer a specific result that sets up an additional safe Republican district or districts, would be an anti-democratic gerrymander, and a violation of the fairness of our process. And it wouldn't be an actual solution to the problems that I have seen -- as overly safe core Democratic districts.

Thank you for your time and your consideration.

MR. WALLACE: Thank you very much for your comments, sir.

Before I call the next speaker, who will be Liz Glynn, I would like to give the balance of the order for this morning's speakers. Ms. Glynn will be followed by Oakley, Gorton, Desai, and Dragon.

And with that, I would now call Liz Glynn to the podium to allow her to speak.

L I Z G L Y N N: Great, thank you; my name is Liz Glynn and I am the Director of Organizing with New Jersey Citizen Action. We're a statewide organization that works on advocating for policies that tackle economic inequality. We also provide direct services for low and middle income families, like financial accounting, healthcare enrollment, and tax prep.

I'm here today because the process of deciding on the lines of the Congressional Districts in New Jersey is foundational to democracy. It determines the collective groups of residents who then elect a Federal representative to advocate on their behalf in Washington D.C.; and the decisions of this Commission profoundly affect the future generations and the future of our country, not only our State. And really, it impacts us all.

We currently have concerns -- a number of concerns -- namely, we have some concerns with the process here, and also with the actual drawing of the map. First, I am concerned that even to be here today took some internet savviness and some familiarity with the process of participating in State government. We appreciate that the Commission has created a website, we also really greatly appreciate that there are 10 public hearings that have been set by this process -- and I know that's more than has been done in the past -- and also that there are some that are in-person and some that are virtual.

But it's unacceptable that the website had a broken link, I believe for most of the week, where if you went to the Commission website to register, it didn't take you anywhere. Luckily myself, and I'm sure many other people here, knew that you could go to the State Legislative website and you could fill out the form from there, but we know most members of the public might not be able to figure that out. It's also unnecessarily

confusing because one of the required fields on this State Leg form is that you have to put in a bill number and you have to put if you are in favor or opposed, which I'm sure would be confusing for the general public.

Also, just to note, the "Contact Us" page for the Commission website -- I tried to actually use that to let you guys know about both these problems, but it doesn't actually allow you to submit your e-mail through that contact page. Also it would be very helpful if the Commission would maintain a public e-mail address that could be used for public correspondence.

Second, to improve transparency and public participation, we believe the public should be given also the opportunity to submit their own maps. You know, there's several different map-making programs now available to the general public; it would allow them to create and submit their own maps during a process that is so impactful towards all of our lives.

Additionally, proposed maps should be made public -- they should be publicly available prior to this certification. And there should be Senate hearings that are allowed to happen where the public can provide input on the proposed maps prior to the vote on certification.

As it comes to creating the lines on the new map, we have some of the same concerns already voiced here about making sure we keep communities of interest together. You know, we should really make every attempt to preserve communities of interest, including those political subdivisions such as counties, cities, and towns. As we all know, splitting of any of these divides existing communities, dilutes their political power, and it impairs our ability to advocate for their shared interests.

Currently with this map we have now, 16 counties are split 25 times; and there are a number of municipalities -- I believe the number is 37 -- that are currently split between more than one congressional district.

That's all we have for today. Thank you so much for your time, Commissioners, for allowing us to publicly speak here today. Thank you.

MR. WALLACE: All right, thank you for your comments, Ms. Glynn.

Our next speaker is Imani Oakley, and she will be followed by Ms. Gorton.

Ms. Oakley.

I M A N I O A K L E Y: Thank you so much, can you hear me?

MR. WALLACE: I can.

MS. OAKLEY: Okay, perfect, perfect.

Good morning everybody, my name is Imani Oakley and I have lived in Montclair as a Black woman -- not a family member of a Black woman, not a neighbor of a Black woman -- but as, physically, a Black woman my entire life in a historically Black section of Montclair. And I'm also currently running for Congress in New Jersey's 10th Congressional District.

I want to start off by saying that, you know, I'm disappointed. Until just days ago, this Commission's website hadn't been updated since 2011. When I tried to register for public comment on Wednesday, just three days before this meeting, the link was actually broken. This sends clear signals that this Commission does not want residents to know what's happening on the Commission and that, ultimately, you all don't want to hear from us.

In a State defined by political machines and backroom deals, that's no surprise. And I'm sure that folks are going to miss these types of meetings -- despite having so many -- and I'm here to make my voice heard anyways. It's no secret that many expect this Commission to redraw the lines of New Jersey's 10th and 11th Congressional District to benefit Congresswoman Mikie Sherrill, the vulnerable Democratic incumbent in NJ 11. Many expect *my* neighborhood -- again, a historically Black neighborhood that's still majority Black -- in Montclair to be redistricted into NJ 11.

I'm here today to speak to you about why this is wrong. Over 22 percent of Montclair's residents are Black, and I believe that most of us live in NJ 10, a 51 percent Black district. To move us into the 11th District -- which is over 80 percent white, overwhelmingly suburban, and significantly wealthier -- deprives our communities -- communities that look like me and our communities -- of the representation that we deserve, and it may well even be a violation of the Voting Rights Act.

Our community challenges with healthcare costs, with gentrification and affordable housing, with New Jersey's long history of environmental racism, are far different than those issues that present themselves in Mendham, Chatham, or many of the other predominantly white suburbs that make up NJ 11.

We are not political pawns to be moved around on a map; we are people who deserve representation. As a resident of Montclair -- and again, a Black resident of Montclair -- running for Congress in New Jersey's 10th District, it's not lost on me that redistricting my neighborhood into NJ 11 would also benefit New Jersey's political machine and benefit the current incumbent, Congressman Donald Payne, a product of the machine. Who, by

the way, the reason he has gotten 70 to 80 percent of the vote each time has to do not with districting, but actually with New Jersey's corrupt ballot design.

Additionally, the reason that he has-- Excuse me. Additionally, redistricting should prioritize democracy and representation. Redistricting should not pit the interests of a Black woman running for Congress against those of a white woman running for Congress in the district next door. It was mentioned that we want to make sure that we are preserving women. Yes, we absolutely do. But we also want more women, it's not just about preserving the one or two that we get each time around. Redistricting should not be a tool to cut out progressive Black women who are independent of big donors, who are independent of party bosses.

And I'm here today to urge this Commission to keep my neighborhood in New Jersey's 10th Congressional District, whose communities are far more similar to ours than the wealthy white suburbs of NJ 11. And I encourage others, regardless of how corrupt and closed-door this process may seem, to speak out on this very, very important issue.

Thank you so much, everyone. Thank you for your time.

MR. WALLACE: All right, thank you for your comments.

Now the next speaker is Ms. Gorton, Alexis Gorton.

ALEXIS GORTON: Hi, my name is Alexis Gorton, I've lived in Bergen County for 16 years. I live in the 38th Legislative District and the 5th Congressional District. I am participating today to ask that you prioritize putting split communities like Teaneck back together, and that you prioritize keeping communities of interest -- particularly for marginalized communities -- together when you draw districts for the next 10 years.

On a personal note, I am asking that you keep Bergen County together in one Congressional district, so that we can organize and advocate for change within our communities on everything from commuting, to infrastructure, to affordable housing, and even policing. The densely populated commuter towns of Bergen County have a lot more in common with each other than we do with the rural communities of Warren and Sussex Counties. And I can tell you from personal experience, from living here for so long, that we are given this excuse that there are differences between the two communities -- types of communities in the 5th Congressional District - - as an excuse for why we can't have the things we want to lobby our representative for.

Alternatively, I would ask if you can't keep Bergen together in one district, that you keep us with other urban and suburban towns in the eastern part of the state, rather than putting us with the rural and farming communities out west.

I also want to thank you for having these public hearings, and I want to echo everyone's comments about making it easier for people to participate by improving your website design. Thank you so much.

MR. WALLACE: Again, thank you for your comments.

The next speaker would be Ms. Desai, Supriya Desai.

S U P R I Y A D E S A I: Thank you, yes, this is Supriya Desai. To the Chair of the Commission, the Honorable Justice Wallace, and to the Republican and Democratic Delegation Chairs and all of the Commissioners of the New Jersey Redistricting Commission, thank you for allowing me to testify before you this morning.

Just one unplanned comment -- as I listened to all of the previous testimony, I'm reminded of an adage about power, which is applicable here: politics and power, of course, go hand in hand. And power is not so much about what one can do for themselves, but real power is about what one can do for others. And you all on the Redistricting Commission are uniquely positioned to be able to do so much for the citizens of the State of New Jersey and for American democracy as a whole.

My name is Supriya Desai, as I mentioned; I live in Bergen County and I'm here on behalf of the League of Women Voters asking you to publicly commit to the fair maps principles that we have outlined -- clear non-partisan line drawing standards that respect communities of interest and prevent gerrymandering, to benefit any party or candidate.

You know, very few people know what those of us on this call know, and that is that congressional district maps impact nearly every aspect of our lives. In fact, I recall that when I was in the seventh grade, a long time ago, I wrote a report celebrating Sandra Day O'Connor's appointment as the first female Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court. I was beyond excited and even at that young age I was deeply empowered by her accomplishments, and announced to everybody who would listen that I, in fact, would be the first Indian American Supreme Court Justice.

Now while that didn't come to pass, what is truly remarkable is that every aspect of that anecdote is affected by congressional district maps. And from-- That means from the U.S. Department of Education standards that recommended a civics curriculum, to the Senate committee that confirmed O'Connor's nomination, to the civil rights laws that were passed by Congress that protected my right to pursue that dream -- everything

started with elected officials who were first candidates who were determined by district voting maps. And those were all actions supported by the majority of voters.

But that was then, so what about now? Frankly, the lack of public outrage at the degree of gerrymandering that our elected officials across the country, not just in New Jersey, have been allowed to get away with over the last 30 years is bad enough. But the damage done by unfair maps, gerrymandered maps, and unchecked political power amassed for the sake of power rather than for public service is far worse, and we see those effects all around us.

Gerrymandering is why the overwhelming majority of Americans, including New Jerseyans, can agree on common sense gun safety laws, a woman's right to control her body and health, and stemming the destruction of our only earth, but one political party can proudly and openly obstruct progress by another party on those very issues, and do so with impunity. Doesn't matter who the parties are, the fact that that dynamic can happen without impunity is really, really what the problem is.

And this is serious. As appointees to this most critical Commission, your challenge is to solve this big, fundamental, and profoundly worrisome problem for the State of New Jersey. To be part of the solution. To make this democratic experiment we're all in more successful. In fact, your challenge is literally to make this union more perfect. So as you hear from the public and plan to meet your challenge, I invite you to consider what legacy you, individually, want to leave as public servants.

And in my mind, that's the only question that truly matters in your role on this Commission. It should serve as your north star. At a time

when trust in government -- the government that only works if we all put our own individual aspirations behind our aspirations for the greater good of an awe-inspiring brave and fragile country -- at a time when trust in that government is at its lowest point, and distrust is at its highest point since Gallop started tracking these numbers five decades ago, will your legacy be that you placed New Jersey at the front of the pack, protecting American democracy; or will your legacy be one of prioritizing petty political power plays and further diminishing a system of government that is crying out to be saved by its citizens?

I often hear people saying that what's happening in our country, what's going on in New Jersey, is crazy. It's not crazy. In large part it's unfair representation. And amazingly, you have the ability to solve that problem. So on behalf of the League of Women Voters, I'm asking you again to publicly commit to the fair maps principles, clear non-partisan line drawing standards that respect communities of interest, and prevent gerrymandering to benefit any particular party or candidate. And I ask you to let that be your legacy.

Once again, thank you for your time and for holding these public hearings.

MR. WALLACE: And thank you very much for your comments.

Our next speaker will be Matt Dragon. Mr. Dragon.

MATT DRAGON: Thank you. Good morning, and thank you to the Commissioners for agreeing to serve in this role, and to the staff facilitating these hearings. My name is Matt Dragon, and I've been a resident of West Orange in Essex County for the last 12 years.

I want to remind you that you are representing the voters of New Jersey, not the political parties, political machines, or individual machines

that have appointed you to serve. As such, we as the residents and voters of New Jersey will be holding you accountable for the decisions this body makes.

We demand an open, transparent, and publicly inclusive process, from the meetings and collection of data and proposed maps to inform your Commission, to the Commissioners' work products in the form of drafts, maps, supporting data, and documentation. Every effort must be made to ensure all voices are not just able to be heard, but actively sought out with an equitable frame on everything this Commission undertakes. We will be watching.

This is a redistricting process like none we have previously seen. Voting rights are under active attack and being rolled back in many states across the country. The census data being used for redistricting was collected during a worldwide pandemic, and suffered from active interference and attempts to undermine the process. And we're in New Jersey -- the only state with a county line on primary ballots, our own unique form of voter suppression, that will be applied in each and every district you prescribe.

So we need to hold our process to the highest standards of transparency, accountability, and public input. This is not a partisan issue, it is a fairness, equity, and accountability issue. The process must include public engagement, meeting people where they are in terms of location, COVID risk, and work and childcare commitments. Public meetings like this one should be announced with at least seven days of public notice, an improved registration process, and you should hold at least one meeting per county, not just the 10 that have been committed to. There needs to be non-partisan, clear, and publicly reviewed standards for line drawing, that include a prioritization for when all standards cannot be satisfied for a given district.

We must respect communities of interest to the largest extent possible, and the Commission must engage with community leaders and citizens to determine where district lines must fall to keep those communities from being divided for political gain. Particular, specific, and regular public attention is needed to ensure racial equity, aligning with the principles set forth in the Voting Rights Act. Planned districts must explicitly not be allowed to favor or protect incumbents, candidates, or political parties.

Maps proposed by the Commission must be made public and a process of hearings and public comment must be allowed for at least 30 days before certification. This must include supporting data and written analysis for the basis of the new districts, that is available for the entire comment period.

The website for the Commission should publicly share the data underlying the redistricting process, and allow for submission and public display of all public comment, data, and maps and missions that the Commission receives.

Thank you, and have a good day.

MR. WALLACE: All right, thank you very much for your comments, sir.

That concludes the list of those who on the registration form indicated they wanted to speak. There were four others who did register, but did not indicate they wanted to speak. And they were a Kumar, Harvey, Barratt, and Yang. Does anyone of those four wish to speak at this time?

MS. KRUGER MARTINEZ: Yes, Mr. Chairman, Ms. Carol Harvey is here. She's the President of the League of Women Voters of Somerset and Hunterdon Counties.

MR. WALLACE: All right, thank you. We'll hear from Ms. Harvey, then.

CAROL HARVEY: Hello. I did not wish to speak at this time, but thank you for asking.

MR. WALLACE: All right, you're quite welcome. And as you know we have other hearings coming up, so if you change your mind at that time you're certainly welcome to address the Commission.

Thank you for being present. Are there any other speakers?

MS. KRUGER MARTINEZ: There are no other speakers.

MR. WALLACE: Okay, thank you very much. Is there any other new business on the part of the Commission, any members want to bring up anything at this time?

MS. FULLER: No, sir, thank you Justice Wallace.

MR. STEINHARDT: No, sir.

MR. WALLACE: All right, hearing none, I would just again remind everyone that our next meeting, which will be an in-person meeting, will be held this coming Tuesday, October 26, at 6 p.m at the Ocean County Community College in Toms River. And again, that address is on our website; and if necessary, COVID protocols will also be listed. Please be aware of that process.

I thank you very much for those who appeared this morning. We look forward to hearing from others, as well as those who spoke today if they wish, again, to give us additional information in the future.

Thank you, and I look forward to seeing the rest of the Commission on Tuesday evening.

MR. STEINHARDT: Chairman, thanks.

MS. PAGLIUGHI: Thank you.

MS. FULLER: Thank you, everyone.

MR. WALLACE: I guess I should entertain a motion to adjourn, rather than just close it myself.

MR. STEINHARDT: So moved.

MR. WALLACE: May I have a motion to adjourn, please.

MR. STEINHARDT: Motion to adjourn.

MR. WALLACE: And is there a second?

MS. FULLER: Second.

MR. WALLACE: It's been moved and seconded we adjourn. All in favor say aye.

ALL: Aye.

MR. WALLACE: The meeting is now adjourned. Thank you, and have a safe and good weekend.

MR. STEINHARDT: Thank you.

(MEETING CONCLUDED)