

Letter:

A truly representative democracy is only possible when voters can choose their elected officials and when elected officials cannot choose their voters. In the wake of the leaked audio released last year revealing comments made by Councilmembers engaged in backroom dealing over Los Angeles' redistricting plans, it is imperative that the current City Council establish a fully independent redistricting commission that restores trust with the people of Los Angeles.

The Studio City Neighborhood Council (SCNC) believes we have the opportunity right now to create a more representative Los Angeles government that seeks to ensure that every Angeleno has a voice in City Hall. An independent redistricting commission (IRC) in Los Angeles would ensure that the decennial process to redraw the boundaries of LA's City Council Districts is placed in the hands of people who will consider the public's interest first, listen to the many communities of Los Angeles, and work to ensure that those who have traditionally been underrepresented have an opportunity to have a voice in the future of the city.

The SCNC agrees that the following principles must serve as a baseline for the formation of an independent redistricting process in Los Angeles:

1. The redistricting commission must be fully independent.

- The commission must use a commissioner selection and appointment process that is independent of elected officials. The IRC has to be free from the control of people that represent or intend to run for these districts.
- Robust conflicts of interest criteria must be used to identify and disqualify applicants who are too close to the city's elected officials and political parties.
- The commission should have independent counsel and staff to assist the IRC in its operations.
- Commissioners must be prohibited from supporting or working for a candidate for elected office in the City during their service.
- After a commissioner's appointment, they must be ineligible to run for Council for the duration of the time the map they drew is in effect.
- The commission must have the final vote and authority to enact district maps. There must be no involvement of City Council in this process.

2. Map-drawing criteria must be community-centered.

- Impartial and community-centered line-drawing criteria, such as those used by the State Citizens Redistricting Commission and local independent redistricting commissions across California, must be adopted.
- Map-drawing criteria must prioritize keeping communities of interest together—populations that share common social or economic interests that should be included within a single district.
- Racial, political, and partisan gerrymandering should be prohibited.
- Observation of the requirements of the US Constitution and the federal Voting Rights Act must be mandated.
- Incumbency must not be considered by any means, such as the residence of any incumbent or any candidate for office. Backdoor methods of protecting incumbency, like preservation of existing district cores and minimizing change, must not be considered.
- Map-drawing criteria must be ranked in order of priority, prioritizing factors such as communities of interest and compliance with federal and state law.

3. An IRC in Los Angeles must be fully transparent and should lead a redistricting process that is inclusive

and participatory.

- There must be ample public input hearings across the City's many neighborhoods before and after draft maps are considered, and there must be public input hearings before a final map is voted on.
- Hearings and information must be made accessible in the many languages of Los Angeles, and ensure that commission meetings and hearings are accessible to people with disabilities to be able to fully participate.
- To ensure transparency and public trust, all communications with commissioners about how the map should be drawn must be accessible to the public and on the record.

4. An IRC must be able to undergo responsive evolution over time.

- To protect the IRC from meddling and politicalization as evolution occurs, any future amendments made must further the purpose and intent of an independent redistricting commission (and if not, face challenge in court) and must require the favorable vote of a super-majority of both the City Council and then-sitting IRC.

5. The size of City Council must be increased to reflect the growth of Los Angeles.

- The last time voters adjusted the size of City Council was in 1924, and the population of Los Angeles has grown enormously since then. The size of Council must reflect the changes in our City's population, and ensure that Councilmembers can be more responsive to their constituents.
- The SCNC supports City Council expansion as long as the new total of City Council seats does not exceed the current total City Council budget. For example, with the total number of City Council seats increased to 25, the total City Council budget would be divided by 25, instead of the current dividing by 15.

The Board of the Studio City Neighborhood Council (SCNC) believes the new total of City Council seats should not exceed the current total City Council budget. For example, if the total number of Council seats is increased to 25, the total City Council budget would be divided by 25, instead of the currently dividing by 15.

Sincerely,

Scott Mandell, President
Studio City Neighborhood Council