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TESTIMONY ON SENATE STAFF CONGRESSIONAL MAP PROPOSAL BEFORE THE REDISTRICTING
SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE SC SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

November 29, 2021

We are disappointed by the Senate's proposed Congressional map. Everyone who is engaged on this issue has realized that the most significant adjustments in the SC Congressional map would involve CD 1 and CD 6. Currently, Congressional District (CD) 1 has far too many people within its boundaries and CD 6 is underpopulated by a comparable amount. The largest adjustments must come in these adjacent districts. The decision that has been made in the Senate Staff proposal is to gerrymander extensively to render CD 1 strongly non-competitive in favor of the Republican Party.

The League's proposal was drawn without reference to voting history and demonstrates that when reasonable boundaries are drawn around genuine communities of interest and political subdivisions in the Lowcountry, CD 1 retains a Republican lean but is competitive for the major parties. The League plan accurately reflects the diverse population is what is increasingly a network of closely tied satellite communities around a center in urban Charleston. The League proposal shows that much of this important community of interest could easily be kept together in CD 1.

The Senate's map, on the other hand, produces what in our measure is a 14-percentage point partisan gap by slicing and dicing this clear community of interest in unreasonable ways. Charleston itself is split. Adjacent North Charleston would continue to be put into a district with Columbia, more than a hundred miles away, although it is very much a part of the social and economic networks associated with Charleston. James Island and Johns Island would be split.

What would the people of South Carolina sacrifice so that the General Assembly can achieve this gerrymander? The answer is a lot. First, the people of CD 1 would lose their ability to influence how they are governed in November elections for the next decade. Only under extreme circumstances would their vote matter in general elections. Throughout South Carolina, citizens would realize that the General Assembly is willing to take meaningful votes away from them. This is not government by and for the people. It is government by and for legislators and for the very small percentage of qualified electors that vote for the favored party in partisan primaries.

Instead of providing a natural context for campaigns focused on policies that are appealing to a diverse community of South Carolinians, CD 1 in this map is designed to respond primarily to very partisan appeals in primary elections and therefore to amplify extremism in our state and national politics. This is not what most South Carolinians want.

The League has other concerns as well:

- There are places where, to blindly follow municipal or county lines, Black communities are split at the border of CD 6. The blocks and precincts surrounding the northern part of City of Sumter are as or nearly as Black as the City precincts across the district line. In many municipalities racially discriminatory annexation often leaves minority populations just outside the municipality. Using the municipal line to crack that community is an extension of that discrimination.

- CD 2 should not have a finger projecting through Columbia. In Richland County, the effort to get CD 2 to Fort Jackson drives CD 2 through the Black communities of northwest Richland, separating them from neighboring communities to allow the incumbent to “keep” Fort Jackson within “his” district. Why must a legislator have a specific base within his district to protect it in deliberations of the House Armed Services Committee? Also, how does an incumbent’s interest constitute a community of interest—especially where it requires violating a clear and very real community of interest of minority voters?
- The Staff Plan does better on splitting Voter Tabulation Districts (VTDs or precincts) than the LWVSC Plan, with only 20 splits to the League’s 23. However, the Senate map clearly views keeping counties together as a much lower value than the League does, splitting 13 to the League’s 6. Everybody finds splitting counties abhorrent—unless it fits another agenda. You don’t have to split that number of counties to achieve effectively equivalent minority population in CD 6. So, we know that these splits are done for other reasons.

If the current Senate plan is enacted, for the next 10 years many South Carolinians will vote in districts for which boundaries have been made absurd to further partisan and incumbent interests. Furthermore, without even one competitive district where candidates must speak to a diverse electorate to win, the potential for real dialogue about issues both on the coast and throughout South Carolina is greatly diminished. A district that is a fair representation of the diverse community in the increasingly urbanized Lowcountry would not solve all of our political problems, but not doing so will surely amplify those problems.

We would very much like to see our own plan enacted. We ask you to consider that and other options that are less damaging to voter rights and to reasonable political dialogue.

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APPENDIX

Our estimates of partisanship are based on general elections in South Carolina from 2016-2020, as calculated for Dave’s Redistricting App (DRA). We regard this as a more reliable measure than the simple Biden-Trump proportions sometimes used.

DISTRICT PARTISAN LEAN

Congress Districts	Current			LWVSC			Senate Staff		
	Rep	Dem	Partisan Gap	Rep	Dem	Partisan Gap	Rep	Dem	Partisan Gap
1	54.46	43.19	11	49.26	48.31	1	55.92	41.82	14
2	56.50	41.29	15	60.29	37.67	23	56.36	41.43	15
3	67.98	30.19	38	68.19	29.96	38	67.92	30.25	38
4	60.81	36.96	24	59.97	37.79	22	59.92	37.84	22
5	57.51	40.58	17	58.85	39.3	20	58.30	39.79	19

6	31.45	67.08	36	35.43	62.95	28	32.60	66.74	34
7	58.54	40.08	18	59.76	39.74	20	58.56	40.06	19

DRA RATINGS

	Competitiveness	Proportionality	Splitting	Compactness	Minority
Current Map	9	0	30	38	50
LWVSC	20	25	78	42	50
Senate Staff	6	0	30	38	50

DRA ASSESSMENT OF PARTISAN LEAN

	Rep Lean	Dem Lean	Number in $\pm 5\%$ Competitive Range
Current Map	6	1	0
LWVSC	5	1	1
Senate Staff	6	1	0