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Arkansas Board of Apportionment Public Meeting

Little Rock, 8/24/21

Public Comment provided by

Loriee Evans, on behalf of Indivisible Little Rock and Central Arkansas

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the Arkansas legislative redistricting process.

I'm Loriee Evans, representing Indivisible Little Rock and Central Arkansas.

- We are a grassroots voting rights advocacy organization, with over 2,000 members across Arkansas.
- Along with our sister chapters, we have members in most of our state's 35 Senate and 100 House districts.

Many of us have been following these helpful public meetings. We'd like to state, for the record, some of the **core principles** that years of precedent and court decisions have set for the Arkansas redistricting process:

1. A redistricting process that ensures no racial dilution, or redistricting based on racial gerry-mandering
2. District map shapes that are compact and contiguous
3. District boundaries that preserve county and town boundaries, whenever possible
4. New maps that preserve the cores of existing districts, to avoid constant reshuffling
5. "Communities of interest" are preserved and not divided by district lines
 - Communities of interest being any Arkansas neighborhood that shares social, cultural, ethnic or religious connections

This is a tall order, with lots of complicated considerations! But it's doable, with meaningful community involvement.

- That last principle is where we know you especially need input from Arkansans. We'll continue asking our members from across the state to share feedback on:
 - their neighborhood's activities & services;
 - their cultural and historical interests;
 - their economic and environmental interests;
 - their area's needs and concerns
- We appreciate a public commitment by the Board of Apportionment to preserve these neighborhoods that Arkansans are describing to you. That's how they'll have an opportunity to elect officials who will meet their community's needs

Everyone needs a real and meaningful opportunity to elect their candidates of choice

- We ask the Board to set a goal that **every Arkansas voter has an equal opportunity to elect officials who will represent their values** and interests

Unfortunately, past redistricting practices ended up creating unequal voting power for minority groups. Map lines have fragmented minority groups in our state.

- As we know, the Voting Rights Act bans the drawing of district lines that water down the voting strength of communities of color.
- And yet, it's still been a problem. We are requesting the 2021 redistricting process do better.

Just a note that my written comments also include several questions for the Board, which I won't read to save time. The staff have been very helpful in answering questions at all 8 of these in-person public meetings --

- but of course there are a lot of folks who have questions about the process who have **not** been able to attend a public meeting.
- Perhaps you're already doing this, but if not, we respectfully request that the Board answer everyone's questions submitted online

Thank you for your public service. Redistricting is a challenging task, and Indivisible is committed to supporting a fair and transparent process. Please call on us anytime if we can help.

**Written Questions, submitted to the Arkansas Board of Apportionment
Loriee Evans, per Indivisible Little Rock and Central Arkansas membership**

In addition to our in-person public comments, we have the following questions to which we respectfully request a response in writing. Our email address is [REDACTED]. Thank you very much.

1. What is the Board's timeline for 1) drawing, 2) releasing, 3) requesting feedback, and 4) finalizing maps for the AR House and Senate districts?
2. Arkansas politics have seen a shift toward extreme partisanship, from all sides, in the past decade. What specific steps is the Board taking to minimize partisan influence on the drawing of map boundaries?
3. By what procedures will these public meetings and public comments influence decisions on map shapes and boundaries?
4. What are the ways in which the Board will make the map-drawing and decision-making process public?
5. Given a past history of racial gerrymandering in Arkansas, how does the Board plan to ensure that district maps will ensure equal opportunity for minority groups to elect representation?