

NY Voting and Civil Rights Groups Call for Transparent Redistricting Process

Groups demand commission open meetings to the public, hold hearings and push for a truly independent process

NEW YORK, NY (01/23/2024) (readMedia)-- Today Common Cause/NY joined the New York Civic Engagement Table, the New York Immigration Coalition, APA VOICE Redistricting Task Force, the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, the Center for Law & Social Justice at Medgar Evers College, Citizens Union, LatinoJustice PRLDEF and the League of Women Voters New York State to demand the New York State Independent Redistricting Commission prioritize transparency and consider public input as they draft new Congressional maps for the 2024 election cycle. Right now, the public has no assurance that Commissioners are not meeting behind closed doors and leaving voters in the dark.

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In December, the New York State Court of Appeals ruled that the state's Congressional maps must be redrawn, concluding that the current version used during the 2022 election cycle was temporary. The ruling ordered the state's independent redistricting commission to submit new maps to the legislature for approval by Feb. 28. They have not committed to holding any public meetings.

The groups urged the New York State Independent Redistricting Commission (IRC) to:

- Hold hybrid public hearings across the state to ensure that the maps reflect the diversity of New York's population and uphold the principles of the Voting Rights Act.
- Allow the public to submit testimony.
- Live stream and record any meeting – including deliberations and mapping discussions – they hold.

The groups also pointed out the success and transparency of a truly independent, citizen-led redistricting commission for New York State, similar to the citizen redistricting commissions successfully used in California and other other jurisdictions and currently at work in Syracuse, NY.

"The so-called independent redistricting commission must open up their meetings and allow for public input. This work can not be done in the dark. The only way to prevent future court battles - and politically appointed commissioners - from deciding our representatives is for the Legislature to adopt a permanent fix to redistricting that centers people over politicians. That means lawmakers must prioritize passing a constitutional amendment that creates a truly independent, citizen-led redistricting commission that puts the power in the hands of New Yorkers – not elected officials," **said Susan Lerner, Executive Director of Common Cause New York.**

In December, many of the groups at the press conference wrote a [letter](#) to the Commissioners demanding they hold hybrid hearings across the state and allow written testimony from the public that the Commission is then required to share with all commissioners.

"As part of rebuilding public trust in the redistricting process, the League of Women Voters of NYS, strongly urges the Commission to provide a clear explanation of how the proposed lines do not violate the constitutional prohibition on favoring or disfavoring candidates or political parties. The Commission must be transparent in its process and decisions," said **Laura Ladd Bierman, Executive Director, League of Women Voters of NYS.**

"The IRC is drawing maps that are going to determine if our communities' voices will be heard on critical issues like affordable health care, war, presidential elections and more for the next 10 years, the public must be able to weigh in on this process," said **Elizabeth R. OuYang, Coordinator, APA VOICE Redistricting Task Force.**

"For the past three decades LatinoJustice PRLDEF has worked to ensure fair redistricting maps that accurately reflect the electoral strength of our communities of color. Which is why we urge the New York State Independent Redistricting Commission to hold public hearings and map deliberations ensuring community members have an opportunity to voice their concerns and opinions. We must center the will of the voters plainly and rectify past disenfranchisement that have long diminished the voting power of our communities," said **Cesar Ruiz, Associate Counsel at LatinoJustice PRLDEF.**

"A fair and equitable redistricting process must be transparent and allow for full participation from the public. If we are to ensure maps that are a true reflection of our diverse communities, the IRC must provide ample and accessible opportunities for the public to weigh in on the maps being redrawn," said **Melody Lopez, co-executive director of New York Civic Engagement Table.**

"Over the next few weeks, the Independent Redistricting Commission has a chance to regain the public trust by being open and transparent about how lines are drawn. Holding public mapping sessions is a well-tested practice that has worked well in other jurisdictions, including New York City. The best way to reduce political intervention and backroom deals is to show the public how their district lines are drawn," said **Ben Weinberg, Director of Public Policy.**

"As this year's election approaches, the active participation of all New Yorkers in the redistricting process is vital for ensuring an inclusive democracy that reflects the diversity and voices of our immigrant communities. To achieve fair and equitable maps, the Independent Redistricting Commission must solicit public input as a fundamental step in the process of creating new congressional districts, while building trust in our system. It is critical for New York to uphold the State Constitution, ensuring that the redistricting process aligns with the principles of equal representation and protection of voting rights for all voters. By doing so, immigrant voters will have a chance to elect new leaders who uplift and champion their concerns," said **Asher Ross, Senior Strategist, New York Immigration Coalition.**

"As Executive Director of the Center for Law and Social Justice (CLSJ) at Medgar Evers College, which has championed fair and equitable redistricting since its inception, I am deeply concerned about the lack of transparency and public involvement in the New York State Independent Redistricting Commission's (IRC) current process. The IRC must prioritize transparency and actively engage the public. This includes holding hybrid hearings across the state and allowing New Yorkers to submit written testimony and participate in public mapping sessions. Furthermore, as part of the Unity Map Coalition, we call for adopting the Unity Map. This map is critical in protecting communities covered by the Voting Rights Act and ensuring equitable political representation. The IRC's current approach undermines public trust in a pivotal election cycle. New Yorkers must have a say in how our district lines are drawn, not just those appointed by officials. We urge the IRC to take immediate action to involve the public and restore faith

in our redistricting process," said **Lurie Daniel-Favors, Esq., Executive Director, Center for Law and Social Justice at Medgar Evers College.**

"AALDEF has advocated for and litigated on behalf of Asian Americans, and other communities of color in redistricting over the last four decades. The current redistricting process in New York is fundamentally broken. The IRC must engage in an open, transparent, and people-led process that results in districts that ensure minority communities have equal access to our state's democracy," said **Ronak Patel, Legal Fellow at the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund.**

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