



Georgia
NAACP

Dear Chairwoman Rich and Chairman Kennedy,

In lieu of your prior request to the Georgia State Conference of the NAACP, please find the enclosed submission of written testimony to the Joint House and Senate Committees on Legislative Redistricting and Reapportionment which we submit to you as we were unable to speak to the joint committee at the meeting which was convened by you on August 30, 2021.

Please share the testimony with the members of your respective legislative and congressional reapportionment and redistricting committees. If you or the members of the committees have any questions about the presentation, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Barbara Pierce
President, Georgia State Conference of the NAACP



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Testimony of Barbara Pierce, President, NAACP Georgia State Conference Submitted for the Record to the Georgia House Legislative and Congressional Reapportionment Committee and Senate Reapportionment and Redistricting Committee Testimony

My name is Barbara Pierce. I am President of the NAACP Georgia State Conference (Georgia NAACP) and a resident of Columbus, Georgia. The Georgia NAACP has held a steadfast presence in Georgia since 1917, with the mission to ensure the political, educational, social, and economic equality and rights of all persons, and eliminate racial hatred and discrimination. Our headquarters is: 2001 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, Suite 307, Atlanta Georgia 30314. We have branches throughout Georgia, with a significant presence in both metropolitan and rural Georgia areas.

For the 2020 redistricting cycle, our goal is to ensure that there is no intentional discrimination and that Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act (VRA) is enforced to protect voters from discrimination in voting practices and procedures based on race, color, or membership in a large minority group. Minority vote dilution can be accomplished through packing (communities placed together in numbers much greater than required to elect their candidates of choice, thus decreasing the number of candidates they can elect), and cracking (communities split between multiple districts thus preventing them from electing their candidates of choice), also known as racial gerrymandering. Racial gerrymandering is a pervasive problem not only in Georgia, but throughout the country, with minority voters over-concentrated in few districts, or unnecessarily split between several districts, thereby weakening the political strength of these voters with shared interests. The Georgia NAACP encourages fair maps and a transparent redistricting process that protects the rights of communities of color.

There have been pronounced demographic shifts in Georgia. While the percentage of white voters has steadily decreased since 2004, the percentage of the minority voters has steadily increased. The Black population in 76 counties has increased since 2010, with marked increases in Cobb, Clayton, Forsyth, Gwinnett, and Henry Counties, among others.

Voting in Georgia is racially polarized. The evidence shows that where Black registered voters are 40 percent or more of the total population, or where voters of color are 50 percent or more of the total population, such voters are typically able to elect candidates of their choice.

Of Georgia's 250 congressional and statewide districts, 138 districts have a white voting-age population of 55 percent or more. Just 71 districts have a voting-age population in which people of color exceed 50 percent. Specifically, four of Georgia's 14 congressional seats have a majority people of color voting-age population; 15 of Georgia's 56 State Senate seats have a

majority people of color voting-age population, and 52 of the state's 180 Georgia House seats have a majority people of color voting-age population. Several of the remaining districts in Georgia create an opportunity for coalition districts, districts where various minorities can join together to have significant influence and opportunities within the district to elect candidates of their choice.

Packing minority voters into as few districts as possible - while maximizing the number of districts where white voters comprise 55 percent or more of the electorate – has long been a strategy to maintain political dominance for white voters. We have already seen this strategy in a recent Georgia Senate Committee proposal, which included a redistricting plan that reduced minority opportunity in congressional districts 2 and 6, both currently held by Black representatives. Although this initial plan –ultimately may not become the actual proposed plan, but it provides a look into the mindset of the Georgia General Assembly and would work an injustice on voters of color.

In drafting new plans, we urge the Georgia Legislature to draw plans that accurately reflect the sizable growth in the population of people of color in the state. The white percentage of the electorate has steadily decreased between 2004 and 2020, while the percentage of the electorate of people of color has steadily increased. By comparison, the Black population has increased by 13.4 percent; the Latinx population by 17.5 percent; and the Asian population by 32.2 percent.

From 2004 to 2020, registered voters of color increased in Georgia from 29.8 percent to 38.3 percent. White voter registration decreased from 68.7 percent in 2006, to its current 52.7 percent. In the 2021 Georgia senate runoff election, 228,000 new voters cast ballots. These voters tended to be more racially diverse and younger than in past elections.

Changing demographics have made Georgia an increasingly competitive state politically. The Georgia Legislature must consider these demographic changes, incorporate fair and transparent redistricting practices, and produce districts that recognize these changes and respect all Georgia voters. As mentioned, as has been done in the past, those in control of Georgia redistricting may minimize minority voting strength by packing voters of color into relatively few districts in order to maximize the number of districts where white voters comprise 55 percent or more of the electorate. Packing and cracking voters of color are indicative of intentional discrimination.

The Georgia General Assembly redistricting guidelines provide criteria for fair redistricting, including, equal population, the VRA, respect for political subdivisions and other census geography, compactness, and communities of interest. Georgia criteria also includes requiring only single-member districts, limiting incumbent pairing, and stating that criteria does not limit consideration of other principles that may have been excluded, but deemed important. The Georgia Reapportionment Committee and the process itself has been cloaked in secrecy. The Committee has failed to adequately provide relevant information about the redistricting process, hearings, hearing accessibility, and information about a November 2020 Special Session for redistricting. Moreover, the guidelines fail to provide a definition for the term “communities of interest”, thus stripping it of meaning and left to the idiosyncratic interpretation of each Committee member.

Taking account of communities of interest is essential to protecting the rights of voters and allowing voters in a geographic area to have autonomy. A standard community of interest definition includes: “recognition and maintenance of patterns of geography, social interaction, trade, political ties, and common interests,” (UCLA Law Review, 33 UCLA L. Rev. 77, 1985). Another example is “A group of people in a defined geographic area with common concerns about issues (such as religion, political ties, history, tradition, geography, demography, ethnicity, culture, social economic status, trade or other common interest) that would benefit from common representation,” (AZ Independent Redistricting Commission).

A number of voters and organizations were present at the previously held reapportionment hearings to voice concerns of a possible discriminatory Georgia General Assembly strategy that undermines minority voting strength and ignores ongoing changes in the Georgia electorate. These voters are anxiously awaiting the November special session to see actual proposed plans and to provide additional testimony. *See* Appendix A. Redistricting - NAACP Branches.

Per the Georgia *2021-2022 GUIDELINES FOR THE HOUSE LEGISLATIVE AND CONGRESSIONAL REAPPORTIONMENT COMMITTEE*, redistricting plans may be presented for consideration by the Committee only through the sponsorship of one or more Member(s) of the General Assembly, along with other requirements for public submission. The Georgia NAACP and coalition partners are ready, willing, and able to abide by all rules designated for proper consideration of redistricting plans provided by the general public.

The Georgia NAACP, in coalition with the Georgia Association of Latino Elected Officials (GALEO), the Georgia Coalition for the People’s Agenda, and the Urban League of Greater Atlanta, have created plans that demonstrate that fair and equitable plans based on the 2020 Census can be drawn for congressional and statewide redistricting. *See* available plans at the GA Unity Maps website: <https://georgiaunitymaps.org/>.

A plan(s) that reflects all of the Georgia redistricting guidelines, with particular interest in respecting the VRA, and the opportunity to establish coalition districts where people of color have a meaningful opportunity to elect candidates of choice does, in fact, exist. Several highlights from all three illustrative coalition plans include the following:

1. 8 of 14 congressional districts are majority people of color,
2. 8 of 14 congressional districts are majority voting-age people of color,
3. 7 of 14 congressional districts are majority citizen voting-age people of color,
4. 7 of 14 congressional districts are majority registered voters of color,
5. 31 of 56 state senate districts are majority people of color,
6. 29 of 56 state senate districts are majority voting-age people of color,
7. 26 of 56 state senate districts are majority citizen voting-age people of color,
8. 27 of 56 state senate districts are majority registered voters of color,
9. 96 of 180 state house districts are majority people of color,
10. 94 of 180 state house districts are majority voting-age people of color,
11. 82 of 180 state house districts are majority citizen voting-age people of color,
12. 87 of 180 state house districts are majority registered voters of color.

In short, the possibility of creating districts where people of color have an equal opportunity to elect candidates of choice is possible without racial gerrymandering, while adhering to the state's redistricting criteria.

Moreover, the coalition's congressional plan unpacks seats with an over-concentration of minority voters, while observing traditional geographic county and city concerns, particularly in the Atlanta region. With reference to the Georgia Senate, a new Asian-American opportunity district was created amid the meeting point of Forsyth, Gwinnett, and Fulton counties. A majority Latino/Hispanic district was also created in northern DeKalb County and western Gwinnett County.

Our nonpartisan, coalition Senate plan outperforms the other plans submitted by ensuring that increases in minority populations are reflected in how districts are constructed, thereby *better* providing people of color an equal opportunity to elect candidates of choice.

For the Georgia House, additional majority-minority districts were created in every southern city except Columbus by unpacking the districts in the current plan. Racial fairness in redistricting allowed for the preservation of all current rural majority-minority districts, despite the loss of population in the region.

The current state house plan has only one majority Latino/Hispanic seat, located in Gwinnett County. Our coalition House plan creates two additional districts adjacent to this Gwinnett County district, as well as a majority Latino/Hispanic district in Gainesville. A fifth Latino/Hispanic majority district was created in Dalton. Other districts with significant Latino population include the following counties: Clayton, Cobb, and Gwinnett. Asian opportunity districts were drawn around Johns Creek in north Fulton, Forsyth, and northeast Gwinnett County.

These newly constructed plans will be offered to the Committee to demonstrate what can be drawn in the interest of fairness to all Georgians, while respecting the Georgia redistricting criteria, and the evolving nature of the Georgia electorate.

In conclusion, Georgia voters are eager to meaningfully participate in this redistricting process and provide oral and written testimony on our communities and election districts, to be certain that our voices are heard. It is important for voters to express their concerns for a fair and transparent redistricting process in our democracy. Georgia voter turnout in the 2020 primary, general election and runoff, all during a pandemic, demonstrates the efforts Georgia voters will endure to exercise their right to vote and meaningfully participate in the electoral process. The Georgia General Assembly must demonstrate their willingness to secure the voting rights of people of color by allowing minority voters a meaningful opportunity to elect candidates of choice. In short, the Georgia General Assembly must enact fair redistricting plans that allow voters to elect their candidates of choice, instead of allowing elected officials to select *their* constituents.

Respectfully,

Barbara Pierce

10/29/2021

Appendix A. REDISTRICTING - NAACP BRANCHES

Liberty County, political district lines were drawn down the center of Renea Camper's Street in Liberty County, splitting the county into two state house districts (much like Glynn County).

Columbia County, African American voting strength declined due to the split (gerrymandering) which was implemented after the recent election of the first African American District Attorney. African Americans makeup 11.2%, Native Americans 0.3%, Asian descent 0.1 %, Pacific Islander 0.8 % of the Columbia County population.

Rockdale County, Georgia House Districts lines serve to divide rather than unite the county. The county has less than 100,000 persons, with a 57.5 percent black population. Rockdale County is divided into six different house districts. The ideal district size for the Georgia General Assembly (House) is 59, 511, thereby resulting in fewer county splits that often occur under a packing scheme. Rockdale County has been cracked unnecessarily into districts that dilute minority voting strength.