

*Editor's note: The following letter is meant for a jurisdiction in which an independent districting or redistricting commission will conduct the districting or redistricting process. It is intended for the body composing that commission and advocates for a commission that is reflective of the racial, ethnic, and gender diversity of the jurisdiction.*

**[[Address]]**

**[[Date]]**

**Dear Members of the *[[ body selecting members for the independent commission, referred to here as the "selection body" ]]*:**

We write to emphasize the importance of racial, ethnic, and gender diversity in the selection of the *[[Districting/Redistricting]]* Commission. A Commission that is fully reflective of the *[[city/county/school district/special district's]]* diversity will be able to lead a *[[districting/redistricting]]* process that is accessible, is inclusive, and has credibility across communities of interest.

Racial and ethnic diversity play a critical role in every districting or redistricting process because the drawing of district boundaries is governed by the protections afforded racial, ethnic, and language minorities in the federal Voting Rights Act (VRA) and the California Voting Rights Act (CVRA). The VRA requires that minority voting strength not be diluted through the "packing" or "cracking" of minority voters.<sup>1</sup> "Cracking" refers to fragmenting minority residents and dispersing them among so many districts that they have political influence in none of the districts or in fewer of the districts than their size merits. "Packing" refers to concentrating as many minorities as possible in as few districts as possible to minimize the number of majority-minority districts. The CVRA similarly creates liability for at-large election systems that prevent minority voters from electing local representatives of their choice or influencing the outcomes of local elections.<sup>2</sup>

*[[If the city charter, court order, or other governing document that creates the districting/redistricting commission addresses the diversity of the commission's membership, cite to the relevant sections here.]]*

The safest way to ensure *[[our city/county/school district/special district]]* will end up with districts that comply with applicable federal and state *[[and local, if applicable]]* law is to select a Commission that appreciates the experience of all of the *[[city/county/school district/special district's]]* diverse communities and counts people from those communities among its commissioners. Further, a diverse and welcoming Commission will lead an equitable *[[districting/redistricting]]* process that invites the community to participate, which is vital because community testimony is an essential ingredient in achieving a credible and representative final district map. A diverse Commission will also engender greater public trust across all communities.

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<sup>1</sup> 52 U.S.C. § 10301.

<sup>2</sup> Cal. Elec. Code § 14027.

There are two simple steps the [[selection body]] can take to ensure that diversity is prioritized appropriately in the selection process.

First, the [[selection body]] should emphasize diversity at every step of the selection process, including in the initial evaluation or ranking. Diversity should not be an afterthought or a secondary priority; it should not be considered when the pool of finalists is beginning to take shape or after the [[selection body]] has already evaluated applicants on their other merits. Just as other qualifications – including knowledge of the [[city/county/school district/special district]], past experiences with districting or redistricting, or the ability to exercise impartial and independent judgment – would earn an applicant a boost in the evaluation process, so too should bringing personal qualities, an identity, or a background that helps a candidate understand all of the [[city/county/school district/special district's]] diverse communities.

Second, because not all members of the [[selection body]] may be familiar with the full racial and ethnic diversity of the [[city/county/school district/special district]], members of the [[selection body]] should be trained on the [[city/county/school district/special district's]] diversity by members of the [[city/county/school district/special district's]] Human Resources office and by an external consultant who is expert in diversity, demographics, and the [[city/county/school district/special district's]] culture and history. Such training should include information about the size and history of the [[city/county/school district/special district's]] communities of color, the meaning and value of diversity, as well as information on how to properly consider race, ethnicity, and gender in hiring or a candidate evaluation process.

The [[selection body]] carries the enormous responsibility of composing a Commission that all residents of the [[city/county/school district/special district]], regardless of race, ethnicity, or language ability, can believe in, and with whom all residents of the [[city/county/school district/special district]] feel comfortable sharing their views and perspectives. Following these steps, the [[selection body]] should be up to the task. [[I/We]] look forward to working with you as the selection process moves forward. Please do not hesitate to contact [[me/us]] if you have any questions.

Sincerely,