



## DELTA SIGMA THETA SORORITY, INC.

*A Service Sorority Founded in 1913*

Pennsylvania Redistricting Cohort  
[paredistrictingcohort@gmail.com](mailto:paredistrictingcohort@gmail.com)

October 13, 2021

Commission Chair Nordenberg Good Afternoon.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before this Commission. I am Linda J. Miller, a proud member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., which was founded in 1913 on the campus of Howard University, an HBCU. I am a resident of Philadelphia and co-chair of Philadelphia Alumnae Chapter's Social Action Committee.

### **ABOUT DELTA SIGMA THETA SORORITY, INC.**

Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated ("Delta" or "Sorority") is a private, non-partisan, not-for-profit organization whose purpose is to provide assistance and support through established programs in local communities throughout the world. The sorority currently has over 350,000 college-educated members in 1,000 collegiate and alumnae chapters located in the United States, Canada, Japan (Tokyo and Okinawa), Germany, the Virgin Islands, Bermuda, the Bahamas, Jamaica, and the Republic of Korea. We have 4,000 Delta members throughout the Commonwealth who are committed to protecting the right to vote and ensuring that the Commonwealth uses maps that fairly reflect the voices of African American Pennsylvanians and other communities of color. In 1913, our 22 founders participated in the Women's Suffrage March two months after establishing the sorority, and our members have been at the forefront of social and political struggles ever since. Today, I speak on behalf of my Pennsylvania Delta sisters.

Today, we would like to share our concerns regarding the following:

1. Gerrymandering
2. Disenfranchisement

### **OVERVIEW**

#### **VOTING RIGHTS ACT**

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 addresses the history of discrimination in voting and the redistricting process. The VRA ensures that state and local governments do not pass laws or policies that deny American citizens the equal right to vote based on race. Section 2 of the VRA protects voters from discrimination based on race, color, or

membership in a language minority group in all election procedures. Racial gerrymandering is a violation of the Voting Rights Act and any map that has the effect of diluting the voting rights of communities of color must be nullified.

## **CENSUS RESULTS INCREASE DIVERSITY, INCREASE OPPORTUNITY**

According to recent Census Data, the Commonwealth's Black and Brown population has significantly increased over the past decade. Currently, communities of color make up over 18% of Pennsylvania's total population and Census data shows that the Commonwealth has become more diverse. There was a 9.8% increase in total Black population; Hispanic or Latino population also significantly increased during the decade. This increase in diversity was distributed throughout the Commonwealth, not just in the urban centers of Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, but also in the rural areas as well. Twenty-six counties saw an increase of 10-49 percent in Black population, and two counties (Lackawanna and Luzerne) each saw an increase of over 50 percent in Black population.

## **GERRYMANDERING**

Delta is focused on the 2020 Census results and its effects on the Commonwealth's legislative district boundaries that impact our Communities of Interest. However, our representation in the state legislature currently lacks the diversity of our state, which can be connected to how the district lines are drawn for state house and state senate. In our diverse Commonwealth, it is critical that Black and Brown communities (in accordance with the Voting Rights Act) are protected in the map-drawing process. We recognize, in the past, redistricting has been done in a manner which prevented Black and Brown voters the chance to elect their candidate(s) of choice. This is known as minority vote dilution.

We remind the Commission that it must develop a redistricting plan that complies with the standards set by the U.S Constitution, the Voting Rights Act, and state law. Those standards require that this Commission does not dilute the voices of Black and Brown voters and deny Black and Brown voters an equal opportunity to participate in the political process and to elect representatives who will support the values and interests of our communities. Maps cannot pack Black voters into too few electoral districts or crack Black communities and other communities of color across multiple districts as schemes to dilute Black and Brown voting power. The Commission also cannot proceed to pack or crack Black voters into and among districts to serve partisan interests without running afoul of the law, as well.

## **DISENFRANCHISEMENT**

Disenfranchisement results explicitly by law or implicitly through requirements applied in a discriminatory fashion, by placing unreasonable requirements on voters for registration or voting. As we have seen time and time again, the burdens of these unreasonable requirements all too frequently fall disproportionately on Black and Brown communities.

In our diverse Commonwealth, it is critical that Black and Brown communities be protected in the map-drawing process. The Voting Rights Act applies to legislative apportionment and prevents district lines that would deny Black and Brown voters an equal opportunity to participate in the political process and to elect representatives of their choice. Redistricting is not just about who we are able to elect, but the opportunity to readily engage with that elected official once in office. Delta encourages each of its members and the communities that we serve to communicate with their elected officials about public policies that are of concern to them. Creating maps that are not equal in population and that are not compact, limits the active engagement our communities.

### **CLOSING REMARKS**

In closing, I come before this body to ask that there be a fair, accessible, and transparent reapportionment process where the following issues are addressed: (a) elimination of gerrymandering that dilutes the voting strength of Black and Brown voters; (b) upholding of the Voting Rights Act regarding fair representation, and (c) development of a fresh approach which recognizes and accounts for the importance of minority Communities of Interest. We appreciate the Commission taking action towards ending prison gerrymandering as that is another cause of imbalanced districts and vote dilution.

Today, we, the members of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., stand on the shoulders of our 22 Founders, thanking the Legislative Reapportionment Commission for its robust and transparent process, thus far. We look forward to endorsing any map that safeguards the principles we have outlined in our testimony today.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before this Commission.