

Greetings distinguished members of the Legislative Reapportionment Commission.

My name is Salewa Ogunmefun and I am the Executive Director of Pennsylvania Voice, a nonpartisan partnership of over 44 state and local based organizations

Including Planned Parenthood of Pennsylvania, Fair Elections Law Center, Council on American-Islamic Relations Philadelphia, League of Women Voters, Black Voters Matter PA, PennFuture, Woori Center, Pennsylvania Immigrant and Citizens Coalition, Vietlead, and Lawyer's Committee for Civil Rights Under Law

working year round to create a more accessible, inclusive, and representative democracy by amplifying the voices, leadership, and expertise of communities that have historically experienced deliberate barriers to civic participation.

From our extensive work leading across the state on the praxis of racial equity, voting rights and access, and civic engagement, we know that elections are decided before anyone has the opportunity to vote, thus in 2017 our redistricting workgroup

Including Make the Road Pennsylvania, CampusVOTE, Amistad Law Project, One Pennsylvania, CASA, SEAMAAC, Alliance for Climate Education, and Common Cause PA

identified the critical need to prioritize racial equity in the 2021 redistricting process to ensure equality of rights and representation that reflects the racial and ethnic demographics throughout the commonwealth. We've partnered with advocates across the country

including Fair Representation in Redistricting, More Equitable Democracy, and the Ohio Organizing Collaborative

To ensure that our analysis around racial equity is the most sophisticated in the state. We established a statewide coalition of over 100 unique organizations, Keystone Counts, which engaged deeply in ensuring Black, Latinx, AAPI, and Arab communities completed the census. Our field program, the largest nongovernmental effort in the country, reached over 405,000 traditionally undercounted households in order to provide accurate data to inform this process.

As of the 2019 American community survey, Black, Indigenous, and communities of color across the commonwealth account for 24% of the population - and although these communities are the fastest growing, the representation of our interest does not translate to Pennsylvania's state legislature. Current district lines do not account for PA's rapidly shifting demographics whose population growth is being entirely driven by growth in the Black, Latinx, and AAPI communities outside of the densely populated urban core, counties including Lehigh, Berks, Lancaster, and York. Our population share in the commonwealth has grown by 4% in the past four years alone.

Political maps drawn in 2021 must reflect the rapidly changing demographics of our commonwealth and create opportunities for Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color, which historically have been undercounted in the census and often left out of the redistricting discussion, to have equality of rights. That begins not with the final maps, but with the process.

The current maps solidify 30 years of racial inequity. In order to produce a truly equitable result, we need to start the map drawing process with blank, unbiased, maps. Otherwise we will fail to meet the state constitutional mandate that “all aspects of the electoral process, to the greatest extent possible, be kept open and unrestricted to the voters of the Commonwealth, and also conducted in a manner which guarantees, to the greatest extent possible, a voter’s right to equal participation in the electoral process.”

Communities of color in Pennsylvania are growing at 12 times the rate of the white population. Although people of color make up 23% of Pennsylvania’s total population, as of 2018 its highest law making body – the state Legislature – was 89% white. We have to prioritize opportunities for the interest of BIPOC communities to be represented to allow for these communities to have the representation they deserve and our constitution requires.

While we do recognize that the Legislative Reapportionment Commission has taken steps to ensure greater transparency and public input in this process, there are multiple steps that the LRC can take going forward to ensure that BIPOC voices are heard and that racial equity will be a core consideration in drawing the maps. For example, our partners at CASA and Make the Road PA have monolingual spanish speakers excited about testifying but as of yesterday, we were unsure of this process.

We appreciate the value of expertise in an undertaking as complicated as this, but it is notable that all of the staffers hired by the LRC, and all of their expert witnesses invited to testify before today have been white. We cannot have an equal opportunity to translate our votes into representation if we do not have adequate opportunity to participate and testify during the redistricting process and community leaders and experts.

To that end, we are suggesting five simple actions that the LRC can take to dramatically improve inclusion for BIPOC voices in the process, and ensure that *all* Pennsylvanians have a seat at the table.

- 1) Publish a full schedule of hearings as soon as is feasible. To date, the hearings have all been scheduled with very little notice. The announcement of the first hearing at which comments from the public would be allowed came with less than a week’s notice, which makes it difficult for people, especially those from marginalized communities, to participate.
- 2) Create room at each of these hearings for public comment, in addition to the provided testimony of academic, legal, and administrative experts. Everyday Pennsylvanians from marginalized communities can provide these experts with invaluable information derived

from their lived experiences. This tool is a form of expertise, and one that should not be neglected.

- 3) Expand the pool of academic, legal and administrative experts asked to give formal testimony at hearings to reflect the Commonwealth's diversity. Thus far, all expert witnesses have been white, in stark contrast to Pennsylvania's 24% BIPOC population. Racial equity is a foundational consideration, and cannot be fully addressed in an isolated hearing. Each expert should be asked to address the racial implications of their proposals and suggestions to the commission as a part of their formal testimony. Implications that race and ethnicity should be considered secondary to data in a process defined by its ability to provide fair representation in a state where a quarter of the population is BIPOC should not be allowed.
- 4) Appoint a community outreach director whose relationships with community organizations will allow for consistent direct engagement with the LRC throughout the reapportionment process. All of the topics for consideration to the LRC require nuance and intentionality in order to achieve truly fair and equitable representation including process considerations such as language access, accessibility, and outreach in addition to map considerations such as census population versus voting eligible population, racial and ethnic voting patterns, as well as the behavior and patterns of the neighboring white voters.
- 5) Draft the 2021 legislative maps de novo. Cementing 30 years of inequity by legitimizing Pennsylvania's current legislative district maps will not allow for the growing populations in Pennsylvania to govern themselves and represent their own interest.

Transparency is a great start to a process that allows for equitable representation in redistricting but full inclusion for all residents of Pennsylvania should be our standard. The LRC must follow through on its stated commitments and uphold its constitutional mandate.

As a Pennsylvania based expert in inclusive democracy, I plan to submit written testimony that speaks to racial equity in Pennsylvania's process, but the limitations of time created by the inclusion of my testimony as public comment, along with over 30 other individuals within a two hour hearing, restricts my ability to expound.

We at Pennsylvania Voice, along with our partner organizations, stand ready to offer our expertise as required to ensure equitable representation for all of Pennsylvania as our constitution, and the Voting Rights Act, require.