

October 5, 2021

**Maryland Legislative Advisory Redistricting Committee
Redistricting 2021****Position:** Informational

Senate President Ferguson, Speaker Jones, and Members of the Commission:

This year, our coalition has been proactive in reaching out to voters about Congressional and Legislative redistricting processes with educational materials, workshops, and webinars. It is important that voters understand the significance of election districts, how they are drawn, the steps in the process, and the opportunities for Marylanders to engage in the redistricting process before the final district maps are brought to a vote. We appreciate the Board's commitment to ensuring Maryland's line-drawing process centers the input of that community. However, in order to afford every eligible voter an opportunity to participate in the redistricting process and to ensure the mapmaking process is as fair, transparent, and inclusive as possible, we have several recommendations for your consideration.

First, we ask that the Commission confirm the dates of the upcoming December Special Session and release current draft maps and line-drawing standards for public review as soon as possible. Marylanders deserve legislative and congressional districts that are fair to all voters and that are produced with complete transparency with respect to the criteria the Commission is using to draw boundaries. Early disclosure of the draft maps and criteria will provide the most opportunity for public review and for Marylanders to engage in the redistricting process before the final district maps are brought to a vote.

We also have some concerns when it comes to the timing and accessibility of public hearings held on the topic of redistricting. Though virtual hearings have made the map-drawing process more accessible to the general public than ever, they are currently scheduled to take place on weekdays between 3 and 5PM, when many Marylanders are still at work or attending school. This means that many citizens who would be interested in making their voices and opinions on the redistricting process heard are unable to meaningfully participate in the process. By the same token, the current 2-hour cap on virtual hearings puts an artificial and unnecessary ceiling on the number of speakers the Commission may hear during any given meeting. These restrictions currently serve as a limiter on transparency and inclusivity within the map-drawing process.

With this in mind, we urge the Commission to move the starting time of virtual hearings back to at least 6PM and to remove the 2-hour cap on virtual hearings. This will ensure that as many voices and opinions as possible are heard throughout the remainder of the redistricting process. It is important to note that an inclusive and participatory process is particularly crucial for historically disenfranchised communities throughout the state. As Maryland's demographics continue to grow and change, we must be sure to center the voices of Black, Latinx, Asian, Pacific Islander, and other historically marginalized communities.

The citizens of Maryland have spent the past decade dealing with the consequences of 2011's heavily gerrymandered map. In 2021, the Commission has an opportunity to improve public trust and overall confidence in our democracy by conducting a mapmaking process openly rather than behind closed doors. Marylanders

deserve legislative districts that are fair to all voters, that are produced with complete transparency, and that will create fair and equal representation to every Marylander, regardless of their political affiliation.

Thank you again for your leadership during this time and for doing all you can to ensure every eligible Marylander can exercise their right to participate in the mapmaking process.

Sincerely,

Morgan Drayton, Policy & Engagement Manager, **Common Cause Maryland**

