

April 23, 2020

2020 Citizens Redistricting Commission
Applicant Review Panel

RE: Need for Geographic & Racial/Ethnic Parity in Representation of Commission

To Whom It May Concern:

The global pandemic that has put our lives and economy on hold has not slowed down the timeline to select finalists for the California Citizen Redistricting Commission. However, in evaluating the applicant pool with respect to race/ethnicity and geography, the existing interview pool of 120 individuals does not accurately represent the state’s diversity or geographic population distribution.

When voters chose to hand the responsibility of creating political boundaries from elected officials to citizens a decade ago, the goal was to ensure that the lines were drawn fairly so that all communities received fair representation and that diverse communities could elect their candidates of choice. The final candidate list ensures representational parity for white residents and other groups, but doesn’t offer fairness to the state’s plurality population. As the list of remaining applicants stands now, Latinos are the only ethnic group that is underrepresented as your panel moves to making a final selection.

Latinos are California’s largest ethnic group at 40 percent of the population, yet only represent 17 percent of the candidate pool that your panel is reviewing before passing along the names of 60 Californians to the state legislature for the final selection round.

It is not enough to choose commissioners from wealthier coastal communities to ensure geographic balance. It is no coincidence that Latinos, as the only ethnic group underrepresented in the current pool, had zero interviewees from northern and southern Los Angeles County, regions that are more than two-thirds Latino. As an example, the current finalist list includes residents from affluent Bay Area cities like Piedmont and El Cerrito, while leaving out less affluent cities like San Fernando or Commerce, which have substantially larger shares of voting age citizens.

Currently, applicants from the nine Bay Area counties make up 20 percent of the applicant pool, which is relative to their share of the state population. This is in comparison to the underrepresentation of the state’s population core—the five county Los Angeles metro region—which has 38 percent of candidates in the pool, despite representing nearly half of all Californians. Even more startling is how Sacramento has the same number of interviewees as San Diego, 11, despite being half the size of the state’s border county.

California has made it clear that accurate representation was a goal in the selection of the final commissioner panel, and has done a commendable job in recruiting applicants. Despite these efforts, Latinos still stand to be left out of a historic effort to end gerrymandering and put in place political boundaries that move the state toward more fair representation. Serious consideration is necessary as it relates to the racial/ethnic and geographic contours of the list of 60 names submitted by your panel to the State Legislature, to ensure important voices are appointed to the final commission.

I can be reached via email: sonjadiaz@luskin.ucla.edu with any questions or additional information regarding this letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'S' and 'D' followed by a horizontal line.

Sonja F. M. Diaz
Executive Director