

Dear Sonoma County Communities,

We are Black and Brown Women who served on the Sonoma County Advisory Redistricting Commission (Commission). The Sonoma County Board of Supervisors (Board) appointed 19 community members to the Commission earlier this year. Historically, and during the last cycle, redistricting was conducted by at least three individuals: the Clerk/Recorder/ Assessor, Sheriff, and District Attorney and lacked a robust independent public process. This was the first year that an independent and community-led Commission was formed in Sonoma County. Many of the members came from diverse backgrounds - culture, ethnicity, life experience, profession, age, etc., however, members of Native American Communities, to our knowledge, may have neither been invited nor sought for appointed to the Commission, even though there was ample opportunity to do this since there were several rounds of appointments as late as two weeks before our final meeting on October 25th¹. The Commission was charged with advising and assisting the Board with recommendations for new supervisorial district boundaries. Based on the 2019 California Assembly Bill No. 849 (“Fair Maps Act”) the new census data released in August of 2021 new lines needed to be drawn. State Attorney General Rob Bonta, sponsor of the Fair Maps Act, celebrated that the Fair Maps Act “will transform how we conduct local redistricting. It provides vulnerable communities, who’ve long been silenced and excluded, a right to be heard in the redistricting process and to maintain their collective power, rather than be divided. This bill will help ensure communities are kept together!”

Though the appointment process was not free of controversy or inequities; the move from 15 to 19 members provided opportunity for more diverse perspectives. We were called to serve and we forged ahead. We were connected to purpose, to serve all communities throughout Sonoma County. During our very first meeting we inquired about the community engagement plan, and were met with microaggressions and resistance from the consultancy and staff. After further conversations in our second meeting, it was clear that there were severe limitations in the communications plan and almost no commitment to community engagement outside of the public hearings, so we worked to strategize resources. After staff continued to state that they did not have resources, continually misstated our role, and a Commissioner resigned because of these very things, we met with Chair Hopkins and Supervisor Gore who then directed staff to allocate more resources and time to the process. It was then that consultant, Dr. Rosa Perez, came on board to focus on equity; a meeting was dedicated to equity and a panel of members from Communities of Interest (COI) joined us on September 13th.

Equitable and culturally appropriate engagement and outreach² were not originally built into the redistricting process. They were mentioned, but it was not until the Commission advocated for an for a focus equity driven process and a comprehensive community engagement plan that focused on historically excluded COI’s, that an “Equity ad hoc” and an “Outreach and Engagement ad hoc” were created to ensure that we were reaching people who would otherwise not have access to this process and whom would be most impacted by it. This work complemented the Federal and State redistricting guidelines, which included identifying COIs, listening to the community, and drafting equity principles to guide in our decision-making. All of these decisions were made unanimously, that is, all commissioners agreed to these essential components in the process. *“Fairness does not mean everyone gets the same. Fairness means everyone gets what they need.”* (Rick Riordan, The Red Pyramid). The result of our push was a set of equity principles to guide our process and the hiring of a consultant to roll out (a more narrow version of) our vision of outreach and engagement in the community. Members of the Commission also presented at various meetings, forums, and neighborhood map drawing parties.

¹ We must recognize and acknowledge that the Wappo, Miwok, and Pomo communities are the original stewards and caretakers of the lands known today as Sonoma County. Although, our federal mandated redistricting processes, move us from these truths, we find it of utmost importance to uplift this truth.

² Members of the community have continually asked that the Board of Supervisors build a system for and allocate ongoing resources to culturally appropriate engagement.

Through the process, time and time again, Communities of Color did not seem to be of priority or focus to the institution of the County of Sonoma. For example, NDC excluded data from Black and Native American communities citing that, “[it] was not statistically significant.” During the commission meetings, if a commissioner of color asked a question, we were met with resistance, having the question flipped or not answered - all forms of microaggressions and despite consistent mention, most of the final maps presented to the Commission continued to split the Roseland and Moorland COIs. Furthermore, by calling into question the ethics and competence of the Commission after a detailed overview and reasoning of our recommendation, the Board of Supervisors furthered a narrative that is harmful to Black and Brown communities.

Regardless of all the challenges and distress we faced, on October 25th, the Commission unanimously voted to recommend and present only one map, NDC D 51162, for the Board to adapt, adjust and adopt. This map met all the Federal and State guidelines and put equity at the core of the redistricting process. In addition to equal population balance and the Voting Rights Act, the following are the guidelines outlined § 2. 21500(c) in the Fair Maps Act set in order of priority as follows:

- To the extent practicable, supervisorial districts shall be geographically contiguous. Areas that meet only at the points of adjoining corners are not contiguous. Areas that are separated by water and not connected by a bridge, tunnel, or regular ferry service are not contiguous.
- To the extent practicable, the geographic integrity of any local neighborhood or local community of interest shall be respected in a manner that minimizes its division. A “community of interest” is a population that shares common social or economic interests that should be included within a single supervisorial district for purposes of its effective and fair representation. Communities of interest do not include relationships with political parties, incumbents, or political candidates.
- To the extent practicable, the geographic integrity of a city or census designated place shall be respected in a manner that minimizes its division.
- Supervisorial district boundaries should be easily identifiable and understandable by residents. To the extent practicable, supervisorial districts shall be bounded by natural and artificial barriers, by streets, or by the boundaries of the county.
- To the extent practicable, and where it does not conflict with the preceding criteria in this subdivision, supervisorial districts shall be drawn to encourage geographical compactness in a manner that nearby areas of population are not bypassed in favor of more distant populations.
- The board shall not adopt supervisorial district boundaries for the purpose of favoring or discriminating against a political party.

On November 16th, despite the unexpected attempt to introduce a new map, which split Rohnert Park and potentially engaged, perhaps inadvertently, in the practice of “cracking” in Santa Rosa, and that no one had seen before, the majority of the Board decided to honor the process and the work of the Commission by agreeing to proceed with the Commission NDC D51162 map and planned on making modifications to that map. Hence, the reason the November 29th agenda item read as follows:

“Conduct a redistricting workshop to discuss and consider modifications to the Board-preferred draft map (NDC 51162-D).”

However, under what could be potentially considered a Brown Act violation, legal review pending, at the November 29th meeting, two other maps were introduced, which to the best of our knowledge, were only available to the public about 1.5 hours prior to the meeting. One of the maps was quickly scrapped after the admission by one Supervisor to have been the one who sent that new map to the staff. The map called the “RP Split” remained; this map contradicted the decision at the November 16th meeting, and violated the meticulous, inclusive, and transparent process that the

commission followed. Further, the RP Split map was also almost an exact replica of a map created by an ARC Commissioner after the Commission unanimously voted to submit NDC 51162-D as the Commission's recommended map to the Board (images comparing modifications to maps are attached). Legal review pending, this map may potentially violate the Equal Protection clause of the US Constitution by carving up the center of Santa Rosa (the County's largest population center and the only urban portion of an otherwise rural Sonoma County), we respectfully ask that a demographic study be conducted. Considering the map divides Santa Rosa's voting districts, it therefore divides COIs and pending legal review, may potentially violate the Voting Rights Act (VRA) as the City adopted these districts to comply with the VRA.

Additionally, Elections Code § 21507.1(a)(2) requires that (2) At least two public hearings shall be held after the board has drawn a draft map or maps of the proposed supervisorial district boundaries. Elections Code § 21508 requires that Participation in redistricting public review process by underrepresented communities and non-English speaking communities (d)(1) A draft map shall be published on the internet for at least seven days before being adopted as a final map by the board provided that, if there are fewer than 28 days until the deadline to adopt boundaries, the draft map may instead be published on the internet for at least three days. (2) Each draft map prepared by a member of the board or by employees or contractors of the county shall be accompanied by information on the total population, citizen voting age population, and racial and ethnic characteristics of the citizen voting age population of each proposed supervisorial district, to the extent the county has that data.

We worked tirelessly and invested countless hours, most of them without fair compensation, so that we could be prepared for the moment the Census Data was released and map considerations could begin. We listened to communities, read reports, learned the Federal and State Guidelines, and did our own outreach, so that we had the capacity to dutifully and responsibly represent Sonoma County. With all due respect, we do not believe that the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors did the same. Therefore, as BIPOC commissioners that went above and beyond our call of duty, even in the face of microaggressions and disrespect, we urge the Board of Supervisors to not commodify equity, to not contribute to the continued exploitation of labor of Black and Brown people, and to not tokenize and gaslight communities historically harmed by racist and oppressive systems. We were brought onto the commission to represent all communities throughout Sonoma County, to follow the Federal and State guidelines and to keep equity at the forefront. We did exactly that, and now we ask the board to do the same.

In service to you,

Black and Brown women of the Sonoma County Advisory Redistricting Commission

Kirstyne Lange

Rocio Rodriguez

Ana Horta

Ana Lugo

Veronica Vencez

Lyndsey Burcina

Stephanie Manieri

Socorro Shiels

cc: Sonoma County Supervisors Hopkins, Coursey, Gore, Gorin, Rabbit
Robert Pittman, Sonoma County Counsel
Linda Schiltgen, Sonoma County Deputy County Counsel
Sheryl Bratton, Sonoma County Administrator
Jill Ravitch, Sonoma County District Attorney
Paul Gullixson, Sonoma County Communications Manager
Sonoma County Advisory Redistricting Commission
Jim Sweeney, Press Democrat
Emma Murphy, Press Democrat
Andrew Graham, Press Democrat

As Advisory Redistricting Committee members, we hold that the following images make clear that the “RP Split” map was not simply a modification of the NDC 51162-D map recommended by the Commission. It is a replica of the map drawn by a Commissioner post the Commission’s deliberations and which was not accepted on November 16th.

