

Draw the Line Minnesota Citizens' Redistricting Commission

October 21, 2011

Minnesota Special Redistricting Panel
c/o Bridget Gernander, Clerk of Appellate Courts
Minnesota Judicial Center
25 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Your Honors:

Draw the Line Minnesota's Citizen Redistricting Commission thanks you for the opportunity to provide public insight to the Minnesota Special Redistricting Panel. We applaud the judicial panel for soliciting testimony from members of the public, including maps. We firmly believe that this will create a better outcome for Minnesotans and more accurate representation for 2012 and beyond.

Our 15-member commission was created by two organizations that are a part of the Minnesota Democracy Network – League of Women Voters Minnesota and the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits – to provide an outlet for citizens to have their voices heard in the redistricting process. As volunteers, and with the logistical support provided by the founding organizations, members twice travelled Minnesota and spoke with over 300 individuals about their communities and asked how they would be best represented on the new Congressional and Legislative maps to be released in February of 2012.

Our commission began with two guiding principles – 1) that citizens should have a stronger voice in the redistricting process and 2) that the redistricting process would benefit from more transparency and open dialogue.

In the past three months, commissioners learned a great deal about Minnesota, the redistricting process, and the difficult choices that must be made when creating a map. The most resounding lesson that we learned was keep the process open. Allow citizens more opportunities to speak up about how their communities are best represented. The outcome of the final map will be better by listening to the people of Minnesota throughout the process.

The written testimony that we are providing to the Court represents our work to date. This report provides:

- An overview of the Citizens' Commission and how the work was conducted.
- Summary of the citizen input that we heard at meetings throughout the state, at least two in each Congressional district.
- Explanation of the criteria that the Citizens' Commission adopted to draw and evaluate the map

Finally, we are including two maps (a congressional and legislative map) as one example of how these principles and criteria could be adopted to Minnesota's new congressional and legislative districts. **It is our opinion, however, that these maps are not complete.** It is an illustration of our work to date.

To comply with the Court's deadline for written testimony, the Commission did not have ample time to accomplish one of the group's critical goals - allowing citizens an opportunity to provide feedback on the nearly complete maps. We believe that this feedback is essential to create maps that will provide fair and responsive representation for all Minnesotans. The Commission believes that the maps are a work in progress – and we are providing to the Court with the hope that citizens will continue to be engaged to improve these maps, or any other maps that may be considered.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to offer this testimony. It was a privilege to speak to so many Minnesotans and to have the chance to have their voices heard in this vital democratic process.

The Citizens Commission

Background

Draw the Line Minnesota (DTLM) is an effort of the Midwest Democracy Network. The four members of the network include Common Cause Minnesota, League of Women Voters Minnesota, Minnesota Council of Nonprofits (MCN), and Take Action Minnesota. The organizations work collaboratively and individually on issues that influence the functioning of our democracy, including redistricting. The Minnesota Democracy Network is funded in part by the Joyce Foundation in Chicago, Illinois and is a part of a larger Midwest Democracy Network.

All of the organizations involved in the Minnesota Democracy Network had been working to raise awareness and involvement around redistricting in the preceding months and had heard a resounding message – there was a need to engage citizens in redistricting, and to do so effectively there needed to be an opportunity for citizens to speak up about their community and to do the hands-on work.

In response to that feedback the League Women Voters Minnesota and Minnesota Council of Non-Profits created the Citizens Redistricting Commission to take advantage of this once-in-a-decade opportunity to shine a spotlight on the redistricting process.

Using their organizational networks and partners, social media, and several press releases, applications were solicited to create a Commission made up of individuals that represented Minnesota's diversity in terms of geography, ethnicity, and political perspectives. The commission members with a brief biography are provided in Appendix A.

Process and Timeline

The Citizens' Redistricting Commission first convened on July 30 for an all-day meeting that included training on the redistricting process by the Brennan Center for Justice. This training focused on the legal requirements around redistricting, compliance with the Voting Rights Act, the process for how redistricting is done in Minnesota and around the country. Commission members discussed preliminary thoughts about the redistricting principles which would later be used to evaluate the comments received from the public testimony – both in-person and online.

In August, the Commission members conducted eight hearings – one in each Congressional District – to talk to citizens about the redistricting process and solicit their input as to how they would like their community's boundaries to be drawn. The Commission capped off the first round of hearings with a day at the Minnesota State Fair where over 100 Minnesotans shared

their thoughts about the redistricting process and informally provided feedback about what the new maps should look like.

The Commission held its second meeting on September 10 to review the feedback received at hearings and began to conceptualize how the concepts would transfer to a map of congressional and legislative districts. Redistricting criteria were further discussed and refined based on the testimony heard at public meetings. Staff created a draft map of the Congressional districts for the Commission, reflecting the initial public input. Mapping software was demonstrated and commission members encouraged to try their hand at creating maps to better understand the redistricting process.

In the last three weeks of September, the Commission revisited each of the Congressional districts. At those meetings, commissioners continued to solicit feedback about the communities being visited. Commission members also discussed the draft maps that were generated after the first round of hearings, as well as understanding of what had already been heard about the community, to receive feedback and refine the understanding of how residents wanted to be represented.

Armed with that information, the commission utilized a GIS specialist to put together a second version of draft maps of Minnesota's legislative and congressional districts. The Commission met again on October 1 to hear from Minnesota State Demographer Tom Gillaspay about Minnesota's population trends and how demographics should be considered as in evaluation of draft maps. The Commission reviewed the maps that were created and discussed how the previously adopted criteria applied to the districts that were drawn.

Commission members continued to review the maps and provide feedback in relation to the criteria that had adopted and the input received at public meetings to refine the maps as an illustration of the Commission's work. On October 10, the Commission met for the final session and agreed to move forward with the adopted criteria and to share the third version of the maps with the Courts and the public.

Our Map Submission

We present these maps (congressional and legislature districts) to the judicial panel as one possible illustration of how the principles that we adopted could be applied. While we feel this is a good representation of our hard work from July through October, we know that it is not complete. Most importantly, we believe that the general public should vet a draft of complete maps before they are adopted. We did not have the time to share these maps with the public and obtain their feedback as to whether or not their community is well represented. We urge you, as Minnesota's Special Redistricting Panel to incorporate this step in your process. (Please note that the maps are attached to this document in the format requested.)

Citizen Input – Summary

The Commission held at least two hearings in each of Minnesota's eight congressional districts. In addition to these hearings, comments were solicited from people online and at the Minnesota State Fair. In total, we heard from over 300 people with a variety of comments about their community, the criteria they would like to see used, and their expectations of the process.

To aid people who attended the meetings frame their comments, we asked the following questions:

- Tell us how you would geographically define your community? (Include neighborhoods and/or regions that are significant to how you live and do business as a resident of your community.)
- What social or economic changes have impacted your community in the last 10 years?
- Beyond the geography of your community, are there other communities of interest that define your community? What racial or ethnic groups are prevalent in your community?
- How have the current legislative or congressional districts affected your community?
- When you look at the census numbers for your district and see if your district has to grow or shrink in size, what other communities, neighborhoods, or regions share a common bond with the residents of your community?

Below is a summary of the comments that we heard from people in each of the eight congressional districts. When available, we have included direct quotes from attendees that accurately summed up the comments offered at that meeting.

First congressional district:

The people in Winona feel connected along the Mississippi river and accompanying rail corridor as far north as Red Wing. A retired gentleman at the first district Winona hearing remarked,

“Minnesota has three types of congressional districts: two are urban – the fourth and the fifth; three are suburban – the second, third, and sixth; and three are greater Minnesota districts – the first, seventh, and eighth, and we are glad to be part of the first congressional district.”

Second congressional district:

The legislative district that includes Northfield has grown by more than 6,000 people, and will obviously need to shrink in size. Those who live in the greater Northfield area remarked: “Please keep the surrounding feeder communities together we feel connected to Northfield.”

With over 20 animated local residents, most clearly endorsed this statement: “Whatever you do, please do not split the Burnsville area into four legislative districts – we have been gerrymandered and divided in the past; we really prefer to be brought together when you draw the lines.”

Third congressional district:

During public hearing in Minnetonka the commission received several very clear messages from concerned citizens. “First do not gerrymander the district; and second, please keep Edina together; and third, we also have growing minority populations (over 21% in the district. One citizen remarked, “There are now more than 7,000 Somalis living in Eden Prairie.”

Fourth congressional district:

The message in east St. Paul was to ensure that the Hmong community gets heard. Because they are new citizens, special outreach about the redistricting process would be helpful. The testimony in the Rondo neighborhood of St. Paul focused around the growing African population moving into an historic African American district – this has brought special challenges to Rondo. Another citizen spoke passionately about the need to deal fairly with the 10,000 Minnesotans who are incarcerated, many of whom are from the urban areas like Rondo and imprisoned in greater Minnesota, where they are counted in the census, but cannot vote.

“If the district lines could be drawn to minimize the number of safe seats, I think that’s the best thing that we can do for democracy because then the elections would be a contest of ideas, and I think that’s what elections should be about. When a district is 70/30, that can’t occur.”

— ARTHUR ALLEN, St. Paul hearing

Fifth congressional district:

Citizens in North Minneapolis offered a variety of ideas that dealt with special community concerns. They advocated keeping economic diversity in the district, which meant keeping job creators and workers together. Another young woman spoke about paying attention to important needs of youth on the Northside.

“I think there needs to be a serious rethinking of how North Minneapolis is cut up, particularly for opportunities for youth. The highest concentration of black Americans in Minnesota is here, particularly youth, and there needs to be a deeper conversation about that and the opportunities we are offering. I feel like there are not enough opportunities and people advocating for the richness of what we have here.”

— BRITTANY LEWIS, Minneapolis

In our second meeting on Minneapolis south side a number of people spoke up about the importance of creating minority opportunity districts – those districts with a 30% or more minority population.

Sixth congressional district

Citizens in St. Cloud remarked, “We like the growing diversity of our area, please keep us together.” We feel a real kinship with the seventh congressional district, and would like to go back. Another added challenge is that St. Cloud is located in three different counties.

Stillwater citizen stated, “Don’t connect us with St. Paul; we belong to Washington County and the river towns – not the downtowns.”

Seventh congressional district

During our hearing in Willmar there were a number of people from the rural areas who very clearly stated, “Do not neglect the needs of small town and rural people at the expense of the big towns like Willmar.”

“I think it makes a lot more sense when people are connected through school systems, through employment patterns. A lot of people from Belgrade drive to Willmar to go to work, or drive to Willmar to grocery shop. Not very many people drive to Albany to work, or Albany to Willmar. That’s a concern.”

“This isn’t all about elections. This is about what happens after the election, and how connected you feel to the person representing you.”

— JESSICA ROHLOFF, Willmar hearing

Those who came to provide input in Moorhead offered a variety of opinions: “We feel a kinship with all the border towns along the Minnesota-Dakota border. We are also connected with all those communities in the Red River valley who deal with flooding and agriculture.” One citizen

shared a most unique understanding of communities of interest when she said, “Our library system is larger than the state of New Jersey, and it really connects us together.” Yet another person offered this statement: “It makes sense to move the Native American reservations over into the eighth congressional district because they share a similar geography and economics.”

Eighth congressional district:

People in Duluth were quite clear, “We do not feel connected with the southern-most part of the eighth congressional district, which is exurban and metro focused.” Others said, “Duluth is almost exactly two legislative districts and one senate district – please keep the city together.” One individual mentioned, “Please consider dividing the institutions of higher learning among several districts to maximize their impact in the legislature.” Another citizen remarked; “We feel that the American Indian reservations ought to be added to the eighth congressional district.”

“I would like to see it politically neutral. Completely blind as to who is voting, and just let the ballots fall where they may.”

— Karen Lewis, Duluth

Citizens’ Redistricting Commission Redistricting Principles

Over the course of three months, the Citizens’ Redistricting Commission collected more than 45 hours of input from 300 Minnesotans equally concerned about how their communities would be represented in the new map. Through this public input and conversations, the Commission has developed four core principles, shared in priority order, that should serve as a compass of public sentiment for the judicial panel and that is reflected in the proposed maps. In addition to the mandated criteria that the districts be equal in population, contiguous, nested, and numbered in accordance with Minnesota statute, the Commission adopted the following principles.

1. Preserve communities of interest including, but not limited to, cities, counties, towns, sovereign entities, school districts, demographics, transportation corridors, and regional economic patterns.

“Communities of Interest” could mean a lot of things to a lot of people, but the Commission has defined it as follows:

A Community of Interest is a grouping of people in a geographic area that share common economic, cultural, demographic, or other interests. Districts should be structured so that Communities of Interest are preserved, and not divided, to ensure fair representation of all Minnesotans.

No matter which corner of the state, preserving communities of interest was a constant refrain across the Commission’s 18 public meetings. People are proud of what makes their individual communities unique and they want to see their community’s unique voice preserved.

Cities want to be kept whole wherever possible. Economic corridors should be incorporated into state and federal representation, rather than have collective interests divided across multiple districts. From farmers in the Red River Valley, to Ojibwae leaders in Northern Minnesota, to southeastern Minnesota’s river valley farming communities and everywhere in between, Minnesotans want to share political representation with the people they work with, do business with, and live with.

Commission members understand that there is no simple method for identifying or quantifying Communities of Interest. To help define the process, judicial decision makers can ask:

- Does the population of a proposed district share similar racial, ethnic/cultural, language or religious characteristics?
- Is the population linked by economic interests, transportation, land use, geographic barriers or by a unique societal institution?
- Does it share similar house, employment, or socioeconomic patterns?
- Does it share similar family structures, population, age, or generational attributes?
- Does it share legal boundaries, such as city, county, school district, or sovereign nation?

The ultimate test for Communities of Interest is identifying strong similarities in multiple areas. For example, do Isanti and Chisago Counties share more common factors with Anoka County to their south, or with Northeastern Minnesota to their north?

The Minnesotans with whom the Commission spoke were abundantly clear: the greatest priority for a redistricting map is ensuring that people share representation with others who share their interests and concerns. Minnesotans believe that protecting this core value of shared representation is essential to both protecting the needs of their communities and to hastening the spread of divisive politics in the state.

There is precedent for formally defining Communities of Interest as a part of the redistricting guidelines. Seventeen states have already done so and commissioners believe this should be a high priority for Minnesota.

2. Ensure fair and non-diluting minority representation.

Minnesota is home to a diverse mix of racial and ethnic communities. Each racial and ethnic community has its own needs and unique perspective. Yet, in a state that has 85 percent White, non-Hispanic residents, by not acknowledging the representative needs of racial and ethnic communities, it would be relatively easy to draw a redistricting map that leaves these unique perspectives without a clear voice in St. Paul or Washington.

Across the Commission's hearings, members consistently heard from Minnesotans about the importance of preserving the voice and integrity of the state's racial and ethnic communities in the final maps drawn. People want to see the state's Indian Country share a Congressional District, to the extent possible, so that American Indians are better equipped to elect someone responsive to their concerns. Likewise, in the metro area, residents attending the commission's meetings voiced a strong interest in seeing the region's African American and new immigrant communities preserved in the state's final redistricting map, rather than divided across legislative districts and further diluted in terms of their potential political influence.

Ultimately, the Commission believes that the needs, status and location of Minnesota's racial and ethnic communities should be fully understood and considered as the state draws its final redistricting map.

3. Do not intentionally protect or defeat incumbents.

The once-a-decade redistricting process will set the stage for how Minnesotans will come together to select future representation. The process is too important to the political representations of all Minnesotans and too essential to the functioning of a democracy to allow the needs of one politician or another to outweigh those of everyday Minnesotans.

For the Minnesotans Commission members heard from at public hearing, the protection or defeat of incumbents goes further than just the needs of one elected official or another. Instead, the public sees the intentional preservation or defeat of incumbents as symptomatic of their greater frustration: the growing prevalence of partisanship in the drawing of Minnesota's districts and the conduct of Minnesota's politicians.

Minnesotans want their representation to be shared with neighbors and communities that share their interests – not far-flung strangers with whom they only share a history of shared representation or a calculation that protects the interests of politicians or political parties. As such, the Commission does not believe the needs of incumbents should be considered as the state draws its final redistricting map.

4. Create compact districts.

Across the public meetings, several Minnesotans voiced a desire to see the state's Congressional and legislative districts as compact as possible to ensure proper access to their representatives. Minnesotans want to know their representatives and to share them with neighboring communities of interest.

For these Minnesotans, geographically spread districts means that elected representatives will have greater ground to cover to connect with constituents across the district and greater variance in the goals and need of constituents across vast geographic spaces. As such, they believe that compact districts will help ensure that elected representatives are accessible to their constituents and in touch with the needs of their district.

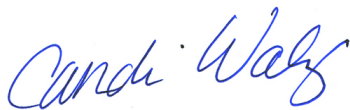
Conclusion and Recommendations

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit this work from the last three months to the Special Redistricting Panel. As a conclusion, we ask that the court:

- 1) Review and adopt the criteria established by our Commission as the final maps are prepared for Minnesota's new Congressional and Legislative districts.
- 2) Continue to provide opportunities for the public to provide input in the process. In the Commission's public meetings, it was clear that Minnesotans have valuable input to offer about how their community should be represented on the new maps and want to be involved with this process. The Commission had hoped to have an opportunity to solicit an additional round of input from citizens on the final draft map; as this would make it stronger. The Citizen's Redistricting Commission encourages the Special Panel on Redistricting to establish a process to solicit feedback and to address any potential concerns raised about the proposed map before work is finalized on February 21, 2012.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony.

Respectfully submitted,



Candi Walz, Chair
Citizens Commission
Draw the Line Minnesota

Appendix A

Citizens Redistricting Commission Members

Lori Berg of Maplewood is a program officer for Minnesota Community Foundation and The Saint Paul Foundation and has worked in the field of philanthropy for twenty-seven years. She was born and raised in rural southwestern Minnesota and through her work is familiar with communities around the state.

Bruce Corrie of St. Paul is the dean of the College of Business and Organizational Leadership at Concordia University-St. Paul. Dr. Corrie has a Ph.D. in Economics and is an expert on the ethnic markets and has been featured in a wide range of international, national and local media. His website and blog can be found at www.ethnictrends.info.

Sally Fineday of Pennington is a member with the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe and Executive Director of Native Vote Alliance of Minnesota. With Native Vote, Sally has helped promote nonpartisan civic engagement and voter participation.

Kathi Hemken of New Hope currently serves as the community's Mayor. Previously, she worked as a planner at Honeywell for twenty-years and served on the city's planning commission. We're pleased to have Kathy's local government experience on the Commission.

Kent Kaiser of St. Paul is a professor of communication at Northwestern College. Previously, he served as the communications and voter outreach director in the office of the Minnesota Secretary of State. While with the Secretary of State's office, he serviced as liaison to the U.S. Census Bureau and on the boards of Kids Voting Minnesota and Kids Voting St. Paul.

Lorna LaGue of Waubun is the Special Projects Director for the White Earth Reservation where she serves in various roles involving community organizing, planning, and development. She works with diverse agencies throughout the State and is a member of the Rediscovery Environmental Learning Center Board and Chair of an enterprise board for the Tribe.

Matthew Lewis of Edina is the Communications Director of the Independence Party and a master's candidate at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs. Last year he served as press secretary to gubernatorial candidate Tom Horner. Previously, in Washington, DC, he worked as a reporter at The Center for Public Integrity covering topics including infrastructure and climate change legislation in conjunction with outlets such as *POLITICO*.

Elda Macias of Minneapolis is Marketing Director for a large Fortune 300 company, developing new marketing strategies for emerging markets. Elda was formerly active in the DFL Latino Caucus, the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Minnesota, and the Scholarship Selection Committee for the Latino Economic Development Center. She is originally from El Paso, Texas.

Anne Mason of St. Paul is the Assistant Director of Communications at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs. She served as a political appointee for Tax and Budget Policy for the US Department of the Treasury, Communications Director for Congressman Mark Kennedy, and Political Director for the Erik Paulsen for Congress campaign.

Sedric McClure of Brooklyn Park is a Multicultural Counselor in Student and Academic Affairs at Macalester College and has worked in multicultural settings in higher education for fifteen years. A current public policy student as well, Sedric is an avid reader of history and civil rights.

Kenya McKnight of Minneapolis is Operations Director of the Northside Economic Opportunity Network, which provides business and economic development services in the areas of training, technical assistance, and loan packaging. She is actively engaged around social and economic justice issues within ethnic communities and serves on the boards of organizations including North Point Health and Wellness and serves as a DFL Director of Senate District 58.

Carl Rosen of Spring Park is a retired social worker, who worked in long-term care nursing homes and at the Hennepin County Psychiatric Unit. He is also a retired Priest and worked at St. John's Abbey in Collegeville for thirteen years.

Karen Saxe of Northfield is Chair of the Department of Mathematics, Statistics, and Computer Science at Macalester College and is actively affiliated with the Mathematics Association of American and the Association of Women in Mathematics. She was also recently elected to serve on the board of the League of Women Voters of Northfield and Cannon Falls.

T. Scott Uzzle of Saint Paul is an attorney with Blaschko & Associates. He was previously an Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney in Virginia. He has authored a detailed memorandum on voting rights in Richmond, Virginia. Prior to law school, he was the Committee Assistant to the Privileges and Elections Committee of the Virginia House of Delegates.

Candi Walz of Lindstrom is an adjunct professor of Political Science at Century College and the small business owner of Let's Talk Kids, LLC. She was Legislative Correspondent at the state Capitol for fifteen daily newspapers in Northeastern Minnesota, and worked in Government Relations at Minnesota State Colleges and Universities and the Minnesota State College Association.