



September 15th, 2023

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
1021 O Street, Suite 9000
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: AB 1248 (Bryan): Independent Redistricting Commissions — Request for Signature

Dear Governor Newsom:

Asian Americans Advancing Justice Southern California (AJSOCAL), California Common Cause, and the League of Women Voters of California respectfully request your signature on Assembly Bill 1248, which would require the use of independent redistricting commissions (IRCs) in large local jurisdictions, to ensure fair, transparent, equitable, and community-centered redistricting for California.

Voters and communities should choose their elected officials; elected officials should not choose their voters. IRCs are the best tool to ensure that the redistricting process respects and fairly represents communities, neighborhoods, and shared interests, and is not exploited by incumbents with their own self-interest at stake.

After California led the nation by establishing the nation's first and best independent redistricting commission at the state level, now is the time to lead again. Despite the fact that the state IRC (aka the Citizens Redistricting Commission)

and the limited number of local IRCs have all proven to be hugely successful, a recent report, [“The Promise of Fair Maps,”](#) found many communities continue to be subjected to gerrymandering, poor public engagement, and a lack of transparency as incumbents with an inherent conflict of interest determine district boundaries.

Local IRCs have received strong but piecemeal legislative support over the years. It is time to take IRCs, a proven solution, statewide. We ask that you sign AB 1248 this year to ensure all large local jurisdictions are committed to establishing IRCs that will empower disenfranchised communities. Your signature will mean California is the first state in the nation to take independent redistricting to the local level on a mass scale, making us a pro-democracy leader once again.

The use of IRCs has been slowly expanding in California. In this last redistricting cycle, local IRCs were used successfully in California, in four counties, 14 cities, and one school district. Three additional counties will use IRCs for the first time in 2030 due to legislative efforts that you signed just last year. As documented by the “Promise of Fair Maps” report, the 2020 cycle demonstrated that IRCs lead to the most participatory, most inclusive, most transparent, and most fair redistricting processes; the most manipulative, most self-serving, and least participatory processes were all run by sitting incumbents.

Despite this track record, and despite the fact that local jurisdictions have the

statutory ability to create their own IRCs, most jurisdictions have not done so on their own. Self-interested incumbents simply do not have an incentive to cede their authority to gerrymander to protect themselves, their majority, or their political party.

Examples observed by our organizations and our partners were innumerable, in blue and red areas alike. For instance, the County of Fresno split the Latino community, the Black community, the Muslim community, the Punjabi community, and the Hmong community in an effort to minimize change and maximize chances of reelection. Fresno specifically presents a useful case study because community-based organizations ended the 2020 redistricting cycle furious with both the Republican-controlled County Board of Supervisors and the Democrat-controlled City Council, after both ignored community testimony in order to pass maps that maximized incumbency advantage.

Additional legislation was introduced this year to expand the number of legislatively created IRCs for specific localities. For instance, legislation to establish an IRC for the City of Los Angeles was introduced after [leaked audio recordings](#) of councilmembers in Los Angeles revealed, in addition to racist and bigoted remarks, attempts to intentionally undercut the power of communities of color and renters. The audio recording revealed elected officials referring to commissioners of the City's advisory redistricting commission as going "rogue" for not aggressively serving

the interests of the elected officials who directly appointed them, highlighting the potential for corruption with advisory commissions that use direct political appointees and give final map approval to incumbent electeds.

While specific scandals and the worst examples of gerrymandering highlight the need for reform, this problem is endemic statewide. The legislature's piecemeal approach is to be applauded for bringing IRCs to several jurisdictions and has proven both the support for and success of this model for redistricting. But the time for statewide leadership and a comprehensive solution is now.

AB 1248 would specifically require counties and cities with populations over 300,000, and educational districts with populations over 500,000 people, to establish an IRC for future redistricting, pursuant to minimum standards and requirements. In the case that a local government fails to establish its own IRC, AB 1248 would require it to use a more detailed default commission outlined in state law. The State Auditor would also be required to help connect applicants to the state commission who are no longer being considered with potential local opportunities to serve, in order to promote large and diverse commissioner pools.

Signing AB 1248 into law now will ensure that communities will not have to go through another cycle of scandals before action is taken, while also deferring to local control. It would also ensure impacted jurisdictions have sufficient time to plan

for and construct their commissions, and that the state has sufficient time to plan for potential future costs. Critically, any costs will be incurred in the 2030-2032 range, when the state's fiscal outlook will be different.

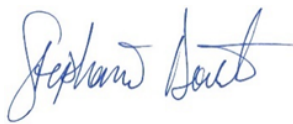
AB 1248 will make California a nationwide leader on building a strong, fair, and more representative local democracy. For these reasons, Asian Americans Advancing Justice Southern California, California Common Cause, and the League of Women Voters of California respectfully request your signature on AB 1248.

Please contact Laurel Brodzinsky, Legislative Director for California Common Cause at lbrodzinsky@commoncause.org, Dora Rose, Deputy Director at the League of Women Voters of California at drose@lwvc.org, or Faith Lee, Legislative Director for AJSOCAL at flee@ajsocal.org with any questions.

Sincerely,



Jonathan Stein
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Stephanie Doute
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