

Co-Chairs Taylor and Salinas, Vice-Chairs, Knopp, and Boshart-Davis, and members of the redistricting committees,

My name is Joe Curran, and I am a Community Organizer at East County Rising Community Projects.

These public hearings are a good starting point and we urge the committee to intentionally focus on providing more opportunities for engagement and education with communities. We also ask that you share further engagement plans with us further in advance so community based organizations have an adequate amount of time to work with community members to continue learning about this process.

Whenever the state says it wants community involvement, participation, or engagement in some process, it must explain exactly what it means by “community.” It must be transparent about what communities are showing up, what communities are at the tables, and, most importantly, what communities have been shut out.

Too often we see “BIPOC” used as a check-box, where an agency has to meet a certain percentage of “BIPOC” but fails to meet the needs of diverse communities of color. I urge the state, not only in it’s redistricting work but across its committees and decision making processes, to do better.

We need to know what structures are in place to ensure decision making is transparent to low-income residents, communities of color, immigrants and especially undocumented immigrants, service workers, single-parent households, houseless community members, seniors and disabled persons. We need to know what mechanisms there are to ensure decision makers are held accountable to these communities.

When the State needs the help of community based organizations to engage communities and learn about the needs, experiences, and ideas of people experiencing the many issues in our state, it must recognize the chronic underfunding and lack of capacity support many grassroots organizations have.

It must also recognize how, time and time again community based organizations are given only a few weeks to do work that, if done over the course of months, would result in the “community engagement” government entities claim to want.

It must also let us know directly when there are updates about decision making processes that affect us—something going “live” on OLIS does not count and is not enough for authentic community engagement.

I ask that you let me know how the state understands and tracks what different communities live in our state; to what extent decision making is transparent to each community; what communication channels the State has to different communities, including what community based organizations are consulted; and what actual power the “community” has in decision making. You can email me at joe@ecrcommunityprojects.org

We are happy that the timeline for redistricting has been extended, and hope you will take our questions, experiences, and frustrations into consideration going forward.

Thank you,
Joe Curran
Community Organizer, East County Rising Community Projects