

April 10, 2021

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

For the record my name is Nakisha Nathan, I use she and her pronouns, and live in Multnomah County, my House District is number 48, and Congressional District 3.

I've lived in Portland since 2012. My fiance and I purchased our first home in the Brentwood Darlington neighborhood in 2017. I was drawn to this community for a number of reasons, the parks, the Springwater Corridor, and oh don't get me started on the variety of cuisines from around the world along and near 82nd Avenue! But I chose to live here because it is where I feel most at home.

This is where I first began building relationships with people who look like me, and share similar life experiences. During my first four years in Portland, I was a garden educator for middle school students at Lane Middle School, and at the Lent K-8 school in the adjacent neighborhood. Many of my students were Black. Some were Indigenous. A lot of the kids spoke two or more languages. And some were immigrants—or their parents had immigrated—from Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America, and the Pacific Islands.

Students would regularly share their struggles and triumphs with me, or boast about religious and cultural celebrations they enjoyed with their friends, neighbors, and families. I also saw how hard it was for them to be heard. I want to be clear on this point. My students spoke for themselves and advocated for their needs frequently. But adults didn't always listen or understand. And when they did, institutional barriers made it difficult if not impossible, for them to address disparities due to racism, inequity, and injustice.

When I think about redistricting, I think about these amazing kids, and I want them to be heard when they speak. I think about the legislation you will be voting on throughout this session and the next, and the impacts on the lives of the students I still care so deeply about. Oregon's growing communities of color deserve to be fairly represented. If our voices are divided because lines are drawn in such a way that dilutes our effectiveness and our capacity to engage, our ability to support one another is hampered. And while the resulting harms are felt first and most deeply by those of us who are Indigenous, Black, and people of color, they do not impact only us.

Please keep this in mind as you move forward through the redistricting process. Share your plan in advance, and ensure there are more opportunities for engagement and education with Oregonians who are BIPOC, so we can be prepared and contribute meaningfully.

Thank you very much for your time and work on this issue.

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