

VIA EMAIL

To:

Sen. Phil Berger, President Pro Tempore, North Carolina Senate
Rep. Tim Moore, Speaker, North Carolina House of Representatives
Sen. Daniel, Sen. Hise, and Sen. Newton, Co-Chairs, Senate Standing Committee on Redistricting and Elections
Rep. D. Hall, Chair, House Standing Committee on Redistricting

CC:

Sen. Dan Blue, Senate Democratic Leader
Rep. Robert T. Reives, II, House Democratic Leader
Members, Senate Standing Committee on Redistricting and Elections
Members, House Standing Committee on Redistricting

September 3, 2021

Dear Legislators,

Public hearings are an essential part of the community redistricting process. These hearings allow North Carolinians to provide you with important information about where they live and the culture of their communities before district maps are drawn – and to give vital feedback after draft maps have been published. Public hearings provide “local knowledge of the character of communities,” which is an explicit component of North Carolina’s approved redistricting criteria.¹

The 34 undersigned organizations urge you to include the following processes to ensure that all North Carolinians can meaningfully participate in public redistricting hearings in 2021:

1. Hold hearings in a diverse and wide array of locations throughout the state.

In 2011, the North Carolina legislature held public hearings at 63 sites across the state.² There were hearings in 36 of North Carolina’s 100 counties – including 24 counties previously covered by Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act.³

¹ Criteria Adopted by Joint Meeting of Committees, August 12, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.ncleg.gov/documentsites/committees/Senate2021-154/2021/08-12-2021/Criteria.adopted.8.12.pdf>.

² See Appendix A.

³ NCGA Statement by Senator Bob Rucho, July 7, 2011. Retrieved from https://www.ncleg.gov/Files/GIS/ReferenceDocs/2011/Joint%20Statement%20by%20Senator%20Bob%20Rucho%20and%20Representative%20David%20Lewis_7.1.11.pdf.

On September 1, 2021, a list of 13 public hearing sites was released to the public.⁴ According to this schedule, the public will have just 13 opportunities to speak directly to policymakers about how maps should be drawn in their communities in 2021.

Shamefully, this list was released to the public before being seen – much less approved – by members of the House Committee on Redistricting and Senate Committee on Redistricting and Elections.⁵ This lack of transparency is unacceptable.

A new public hearing schedule should be released that includes hearings in every Congressional district of the state. Major population hubs excluded from the proposed hearing schedule – including Raleigh, Greensboro, and Asheville – should be added. We urge you to offer the most public hearings possible, and that this list includes previously gerrymandered districts.

2. Schedule hearings both before and after maps are released to the public.

During the Joint Redistricting Committee meeting on August 18, 2021, Chairman Hise stated that the committee does not plan to hold statewide public hearings after maps are released to the public.⁶ Senator Hise’s statement is both disappointing and unexpected, as public hearings were held at 19 sites after draft maps were released in 2011.⁷

We call on you to offer a robust public hearing schedule after maps are released to the public. North Carolinians know their communities best, and can provide the most useful and important feedback to legislators after viewing draft maps.

3. Provide remote participation for all public hearings for those who are unable to attend in person.

COVID-19 continues to surge across our state.⁸ The legislature must respond by offering remote accessibility for all public hearings. These remote options must allow for individuals to meaningfully engage and participate in the same way as those who attend in person. Recent innovations in online meetings have provided the technology to make this possible. Public hearings should be live streamed to allow for North Carolinians to view in real time.

⁴ Joint Public Hearing Schedule, September 1, 2021. Retrieved from <https://ncleg.gov/documents/sites/committees/Senate2021-154/2021/General%20Redistricting%20Information/Public%20Hearing%20Schedule.pdf>.

⁵ Quote from Rep. Zack Hawkins, Sept. 1, 2021: “All members of the NC House found out at the end of session that a calendar for public hearings had been finalized and as a member of the Redistricting Committee, I didn’t receive an email or notice that we were moving forward on the schedule.”

⁶ NCGA Joint Redistricting Committee, August 18, 2021. See video at 48:48. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fi7MRCyUU4&t=1285s>.

⁷ North Carolina Redistricting - 2011 Public Hearing Information (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.ncleg.gov/Legislation/SupplementalDocs/2011/publichearings/redistricting>.

⁸ COVID-19 patients in ICUs reaches pandemic high in NC amid ongoing delta surge, Raleigh News & Observer, August 26, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.newsobserver.com/news/coronavirus/article253760313.html>.

North Carolinians who do not have access to a computer or reliable internet access should also be able to fully participate in the public hearing process. Public comments should be accepted by mail and by phone, and the Committee should form a toll free hotline to allow callers to record their comments.

4. Offer public education about the redistricting process in the lead-up to public hearings.

The North Carolina General Assembly must help residents understand the redistricting process. We cannot expect North Carolinians to meaningfully participate in public hearings if they are unfamiliar with the redistricting process.

To that end, North Carolina must immediately establish a website that includes all redistricting information in one location. Whereas the current redistricting webpage only serves as a warehouse for documents, this site should be accessible, educational, intuitive, and easy to use. States with such websites include [Texas](#), [Virginia](#), and [California](#).

5. Widely advertise public hearings, giving the public enough time to prepare.

Hearings should be advertised in multiple formats, including social media, television, radio, and print publications. An educational element should also be paired with each advertisement, as the term “redistricting” may be unfamiliar to many audiences.

Advertising should be done in media outlets and local forums that serve Black and Brown communities. This should include Spanish-language radio and television stations, as well as other language-specific media outlets that are reflective of the communities where hearings take place.

Lastly, public notices must be released two weeks prior to each meeting. We were disheartened to see the committee give only five days' notice for the first public hearing on redistricting criteria.⁹ We implore you to give North Carolinians enough time to learn about public hearings, review documents, and prepare their comments.

6. Prioritize safety and accessibility at all public hearings.

In-person public hearing sites should be accessible by public transport and easily used by individuals with disabilities. For both in-person and remote attendees, Spanish language and sign language interpretation should be offered and advertised in advance of each hearing.

In light of the recent spike in COVID-19 cases, the Joint Redistricting Committee must provide PPE to all attendees, and both masking and social distancing should be enforced.

⁹ A public hearing on redistricting criteria was announced at the Joint Committee hearing on August 5 and held on August 10. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yw2a3c_WMgw&t=1467s.

7. Hold hearings at times that are convenient to average North Carolinians.

The first public hearing of 2021 was held on a Tuesday morning at 8:30 am -- a time when many North Carolinians were working or caring for their families.¹⁰ All future public hearings should be held in evenings and on weekends to ensure that all North Carolinians can participate. Childcare should be available to those who have caretaking responsibilities.

8. Make video and notes of public hearings available online for public viewing.

Testimony given at public hearings should be recorded and accessible via the NCGA redistricting website. Additionally, all public comments made via the online comment portal or hotline should be immediately released to the public.

States throughout the country are demonstrating how to meaningfully include the public in the community redistricting process -- including here in the South. In July 2021, Alabama lawmakers told their constituents they would hold nearly 30 public hearings in September on new district maps.¹¹ Even Mississippi lawmakers announced their schedule three weeks prior to kicking off their state's public hearings in 2021.¹²

We are encouraged to hear North Carolina legislators discuss the need for the 2021 redistricting process to be more transparent and accessible. We urge you to live up to these ideals by developing a public hearing schedule that allows ALL North Carolinians to make their voices heard.

Sincerely,

Democracy North Carolina
ACLU of North Carolina
Action for the Climate Emergency
Asociación Dominicana
BREATHE Harnett
Care in Action NC
Carolina Jews for Justice
Church World Service
Common Cause North Carolina
Comunidad Vida Nueva NC

¹⁰ NCGA Joint Redistricting Committee, August 10, 2021. See agenda at <https://ncleg.gov/documents/sites/committees/House2021-182/2021/August%2010.%202021/House%20Committee%20on%20Redistricting%20Agenda%20for%208-10-21%20.30%20AM.pdf>

¹¹ "Alabama lawmakers expect more than 20 public hearings on redistricting," *Alabama.com*, July 15, 2021, <https://www.al.com/news/2021/07/alabama-lawmakers-expect-more-than-20-public-hearings-on-redistricting.html>

¹² "Legislators set public redistricting hearings, complete with live-streaming," *Mississippi Today*, July 12, 2021, <https://mississippitoday.org/2021/07/12/mississippi-redistricting-hearings-set/>

El Pueblo
Fair Elections Center and Campus Vote Project
Fayetteville Police Accountability Community Taskforce
Fortaleza
Forward Justice Action Network
Friends of the Earth
Helping All People Excel
Interfaith Initiative for Social Justice
League of Women Voters Charlotte Mecklenburg
League of Women Voters of North Carolina
NC Black Alliance
NC Counts Coalition
NC League of Conservation Voters
NC NAACP
NCPIRG
North Carolina AIDS Action Network
North Carolina Asian Americans Together
North Carolina Council of Churches
North Carolina Voters for Clean Elections
Orchid Bloom
Planned Parenthood South Atlantic
Southern Coalition for Social Justice
StrongerNC
UE LOCAL 150/Black Workers For Justice
Unifour One
Women Organizing for Wilmington

Appendix A

Table 1: Comparing 2011 Hearings with Proposed 2021 Plan

	2011 ¹³	2021 (Announced ¹⁴)
Hearings Information		
Total hearings	15 "simultaneously interconnected" hearings	13
Total hearing sites	63	13
Hearings before initial maps released	13	13
Hearings after initial maps released	1 (congressional) 1 (state)	0 (congressional) 0 (state)
Hearing sites provided after initial maps released	9 (congressional) 10 (state)	0 and 0
Total sites offering public hearings on weekends	11	0
Weekday hearings beginning after 7:00pm	6	0
Location Information		
Total counties hosting a hearing site	36	13
Total locations that hosted hearing sites	41	13
Most common hearing sites	Community Colleges	Community Colleges
Counties previously covered by Section 5 of VRA that hosted a hearing site	24	5
Number of hearing sites in counties previously covered by Section 5 of VRA	37	5

¹³ North Carolina Redistricting - 2011 Public Hearing Information (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.ncleg.gov/Legislation/SupplementalDocs/2011/publichearings/redistricting>

¹⁴ Joint Public Hearing Schedule (September 1, 2021). Retrieved from: <https://ncleg.gov/documents/sites/committees/Senate2021-154/2021/General%20Redistricting%20Information/Public%20Hearing%20Schedule.pdf>

Table 2: 2021 Proposed Hearing Sites - Race & Hispanic Origin Demographics¹⁵

County	2020 Population ¹⁶	White	Black	Asian	Am. Indian / Alaskan Native	Hawaiian / Pac. Is.	Two or more	Hispanic/ Latino	White - Not Hispanic
Alamance	171,415	73.6%	20.9%	1.7%	1.5%	0.1%	2.3%	13.1%	62.9%
Caldwell	80,652	91.5%	5.2%	0.8%	0.6%	0.1%	1.8%	5.9%	86.7%
Cumberland	334,728	51.1%	39.1%	2.7%	1.9%	0.4%	4.8%	12.1%	42.4%
Durham	324,833	54.0%	36.9%	5.5%	0.9%	0.1%	2.6%	13.7%	43.0%
Forsyth	382,590	66.6%	27.5%	2.6%	0.9%	0.1%	2.3%	13.3%	56.3%
Iredell	186,693	82.3%	12.3%	2.8%	0.5%	0.1%	2.1%	8.0%	75.4%
Jackson	43,109	85.2%	2.4%	1.1%	9.1%	-	2.2%	6.2%	80.6%
Mecklenburg	1,115,482	57.3%	33.0%	6.3%	0.8%	0.1%	2.5%	13.8%	46.1%
Nash	94,970	54.7%	41.3%	1.0%	1.0%	0.1%	1.9%	7.4%	48.9%
New Hanover	225,702	82.2%	13.4%	1.6%	0.6%	0.1%	2.1%	5.8%	77.4%
Pasquotank	40,568	58.5%	36.6%	1.6%	0.6%	0.1%	2.6%	5.8%	54.3%
Pitt	170,243	59.1%	35.9%	2.1%	0.5%	0.1%	2.2%	6.5%	54.1%
Robeson	116,530	30.6%	23.6%	0.7%	42.3%	0.2%	2.7%	9.2%	24.7%
N.C. Total	10,439,388	70.6%	22.2%	3.2%	1.6%	0.1%	2.3%	9.8%	62.6%

¹⁵ U.S. Census Bureau Quick Facts (2019). Retrieved from: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045219>.

¹⁶ 2020 Total Population by County (n.d.) Retrieved from: https://ncleg.gov/documents/sites/committees/Senate2021-154/2021/08-18-2021/Handouts/2020_District_Pop_Vari_ances_for_Clustering_landscape.pdf.