

## Communication from Public

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**Date Submitted:** 08/11/2020 11:51 AM

**Council File No:** 20-0668

**Comments for Public Posting:** I am writing to you about Item #14 (20-0668) on the agenda for Tuesday, August 8, 2015: RULES, ELECTIONS, AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE REPORT relative to the 2020 Redistricting Process. In the past, the redistricting of Los Angeles council districts has resulted in contention and litigation. This is in large part because faith in the system employed by the City of Los Angeles is vulnerable to manipulation, leading to an erosion of trust in the integrity of the system. How district lines are drawn impacts representative government in a fundamental way and any unfair manipulation of how that is done, real or perceived, is seen as a threat to genuine representation. That does not have to be the case. Although it is too late to transition to a truly independent commission like that used by the State and several counties and cities throughout California, there are easy, low- to no-cost changes that this Council can implement to protect the integrity of the process and restore some faith in how the redistricting is performed. When commissioners are appointed, the commissioners or the appointing official should provide biographical & demographic information, as well as a disclosure of any conflicts of interest and relationships with council members. The City Charter does not dictate the procedure here, so the Council can easily make this the practice going forward. Commission staff should similarly disclose conflicts of interest and council member relationships. Just as current and recent city officers and employees cannot serve as commissioners, they should be barred from serving as commission staff. The City should embrace the state of California's practice of prohibiting ex parte communications, ensuring that commissioners are not being influenced by back channel conversations. Although I am skeptical of arguments that such a prohibition is not enforceable, then ex parte communications should be disclosed immediately in full and made public. It should not be possible for council members to unilaterally remove the commissioner he or she appointed. The council member may have appointed the commissioner, but the commission and its officers serve the city, not the individual council members. The City Charter does not dictate a removal procedure, so the Council is free to determine the process here. Instead of unilateral removal, you can require that removal can

only be done with approval of a majority of the Commission. This allows the removal of problem commissioners without making the commissioners beholden to any council members whose desire to serve the City and its communities is not in alignment with his or her desire to ensure a safe reelection. The City of Los Angeles is behind the times in continuing to employ a redistricting process so heavily influenced by the elected officials who will run for reelection in those districts. The State of California, the County of Los Angeles, and many municipalities have made the move to independent redistricting commissions and a city with the size and diversity of Los Angeles should as well. As long as the redistricting process seems vulnerable to manipulation by City Council and its members, it will be distrusted - especially in light of recent corruption scandals. In this kind of environment, any redistricting outcome will be rife with legal challenge and subject to much public scorn. The only way ensure a sufficiently just redistricting - and to appear as if a sufficiently just redistricting has been achieved - is to enact changes that make the redistricting less vulnerable to the influence of the Council. These changes won't eliminate legal challenge or immediately restore trust - that will take time - but they cost next to nothing and go a long way to improving the nature of the redistricting outcome, restoring public trust, and reducing the likelihood of legal challenges. We urge to strongly consider making these changes and any other reforms that give the commission greater independence from City government, for your sake and the sake of the communities you serve. Thank you for your time and consideration of this very important matter.