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HISTORIC HIGHLAND PARK NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL

August 3, 2023

COMMUNITY IMPACT STATEMENT ON CITY GOVERNANCE REFORM

City of Los Angeles

Ad Hoc Committee on City Governance Reform:

RE: City Governance Reform, Council File Number: 22-1196-s1

The Historic Highland Park Neighborhood Council (HHPNC) represents over 60,000 Los Angeles stakeholders who reside, own property or conduct business in the neighborhoods of Highland Park and Garvanza. The HHPNC Board voted at its Board and Stakeholder meeting held August 3, 2023 to submit this Community Impact Statement in regards to City Governance Reform.

We reviewed the Draft Recommendations for a Better Governed LA City, Interim Report of the LA Governance Reform Project dated June 15, 2023. We provide the following letter on behalf of our Historic Highland Park Neighborhood Council. Our stakeholders will be impacted by the reforms and we wish to make certain that their voices remain heard.

We are Strongly opposed to the proposal for four At-Large Seats:

We strongly disagree with the proposal that four of the twenty-five city council members be elected at large. All of the seats should be elected by district. At-large districts in Los Angeles have a long history of favoring candidates who are not representative of communities of color. Indeed, in the examples given in the report, more often than not the officials elected at large were white whereas the district elections tended to elect more representatives who were members of communities of color. Currently, with district

elections only 5 of the 15 seats are held by Latinos even though Latinos make up roughly 48.4 percent of the population of the City of Los Angeles. Having four at large seats will result in less opportunity for Latino voters to choose a representative of their choice and will result in a council that is less representative of the City as a whole. At-Large Elections will favor High propensity voters who already have more of a voice in City elections and disfavors low propensity voters.

We support an Independent Redistricting Commission:

We support most of the recommendations for creating an independent redistricting Commission.

The Redistricting Commission's decisions should not be advisory. An advisory commission where politicians ultimately make the decisions has led to the Commission's recommendations being ignored.

Commission members should not be elected officials and should not be appointed by elected officials. We agree with the suggestions for choosing Commissioners.

While we support most of the recommendations for an Independent Redistricting Commission, we disagree with the following: a lifelong disqualification for candidates, office holders and appointees. While current candidates, office holders, and appointees should be disqualified, we prefer a 10-year disqualification period similar to that in the Congressional "For the People Act." Additionally, it is not clear who are the office holders that would be excluded? For example, are Neighborhood Council members considered office holders?

We also believe that the following should be disqualified as well:

- A donor to the campaign of any candidate for public office or to any political action committee (other than a donor who, during any of such covered periods, gives an aggregate amount of \$1,000 or less to the campaigns of all candidates for all public offices and to all political action committees).
- An individual who paid a civil money penalty or criminal fine, or was sentenced to a term of imprisonment, for violating any provision of election or ethics law.
- An individual or an immediate family member of the individual is an agent of a foreign principal under the Foreign Agents Registration Act of 1938, as amended ([22 U.S.C. 611 et seq.](#)).

While the report did not make a recommendation on how the last seven commissioners should be appointed, we believe that the first 10 Commissioners should select the last seven to ensure any representational shortcomings apparent in the first 10 members are overcome.

Ability for Full Public Participation from All Communities throughout Los Angeles

There must be extensive outreach to all the communities in the City of Los Angeles to ensure that applicants to the Redistricting Commission are representative. Special attention must be given to communities which have been historically underrepresented.

We recommend that there should be robust public input on Redistricting with many public hearings. We suggest that Section 2413. Public notice and input of the “For the People Act.” Be reviewed for suggestions.

See: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/1>

We agree that a package of reforms should be on the November 2024 ballot

This will ensure the largest amount of participation from our electorate and hopefully will include voters that are as diverse as our City and are representative of all of our communities throughout the City of Los Angeles.

We encourage the City to send Vote by Mail ballots to all registered voters and **to provide more in person options in communities that had low voter turn-out in the 2020 and 2022 elections and those which have had historically low turn-out in the City.** As noted in the 2020 elections, limiting in-person options discouraged turnout for African Americans and for elderly Latino voters in Los Angeles County in the 2022 elections.

See:

<https://www.ppic.org/publication/equity-in-voter-turnout-after-pandemic-election-policy-changes/>

See Also:

<https://capitolweekly.net/ca120-voter-reforms-increased-latino-votes-but-not-latino-voting-power/>

- limiting in-person options actually discouraged turnout for African Americans, and often for Latinos.

We support an increase in the number of Council Seats:

Currently, with a population of 3.9 million people each City Council member represents approximately 260,000 residents. While we agree with the recommendation that the council size should be increased we believe the number of council members should be between 25 and 39. A larger council could provide more of an opportunity for our racial and ethnic communities to be able to have the opportunity to elect a representative of their choice. We feel that the interim report provided too little analysis on this issue. Additionally, with a smaller number of constituents we believe each representative would be able to provide better constituent services. A council with 39 members would mean a council member would have approximately 100,000 residents.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON ETHICS REFORM

We agree with the recommendations, but would like to add these further suggestions for study and possible reform.

Democracy Vouchers

We have previously submitted a Community Impact Statement in support of Democracy Vouchers. In short, we suggest including Democracy Vouchers because they enable constituents to use these vouchers to donate to campaigns and thereby help counterbalance the impact of big donors in City elections.

What impact have term limits had on Corruption:

An issue that was not addressed is if there is a connection between term limits and the increase in corruption we are seeing in the City of Los Angeles. Statewide and in Los Angeles voters have implemented term limits. The report has not addressed the impact term limits have had on representatives constantly looking for their next seat and constantly fundraising. Are representatives constantly fundraising more beholden to outside groups than to their constituents because they are looking to their next office? Are they more beholden to outside groups because they will be looking for employment after serving on the council.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment.

Thank you,



Angela Gonzales-Torres

President

Historic Highland Park Neighborhood Council