

# California State Senate

SENATOR  
MARÍA ELENA DURAZO  
TWENTY-SIXTH SENATE DISTRICT



14 February 2023

Los Angeles City Council  
200 N Spring St.  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Members of the City Council,

The simple and compelling truth is that redistricting has always brought out the worst tendencies in politicians.

We know there is a better way to draw political boundaries. Jurisdictions that have enacted truly independent redistricting commissions have high levels of public participation, less gerrymandering, and districts that represent communities, not individual self-interests.

The State of California, the Counties of Los Angeles and San Diego, the City of Long Beach, and several other cities and counties have independent and bipartisan citizen commissions that draw the boundaries for congressional, legislative, and local government seats and school board districts.

The City of Los Angeles is now the largest elected government body in the state without independent redistricting. It was an overdue change before a leaked audio recording; today, it will help restore faith in city government. SB 52 will restore public trust by moving the process from the backrooms of self-interest onto the public stage.

Councilmembers Krekorian and Raman have placed in front of you an item that had no debate or analysis before a committee. The Councilmembers have yet to attempt or express any interest in communicating with me. If they had, I would gladly share the amendments we were planning after consultation with legal experts. Shamefully, they did not, and what was presented to you is now an older version of the bill.

Frankly, how can you perform the task of creating independent redistricting when you continue to allow your self-interest to control your efforts?

In October 2021, some of you asked for Independent Redistricting to be placed on the ballot in November 2022. That date came and went. Some of you supported a motion in October of 2022 to direct the preparation of a 2024 ballot measure, but four months later, nothing. The opposition has come quickly, but responsible action has yet to arrive.

It's time to break the cycle of self-interest. Support SB52.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "María Elena Durazo". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

MARÍA ELENA DURAZO  
State Senator  
Twenty-Sixth Senate District

Enclosures

cc: Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass  
Los Angeles City Attorney Hydee Feldstein Soto  
Office of the City Clerk

February 4, 2022

Senator Maria Elena Durazo

[MariaElena.Durazo@sen.ca.gov](mailto:MariaElena.Durazo@sen.ca.gov)

Dear Senator Durazo,

I have reviewed SB 52, which would require large cities in California to have independent commissions for the drawing of city council districts. This would bring districting practices in these cities in accord with state policy, as reflected in California's use of independent districting commissions for both the California legislature and the seats in the United State House of Representatives.

I believe that SB 52 would be consistent with the California Constitution and should be upheld by the courts. Article XI, section 5 of the state Constitution, creates the "home rule" doctrine for charter cities. This provision authorizes them to govern themselves, free from state intrusion, as to matters deemed "municipal affairs."

Elections have traditionally been deemed "municipal affairs." *See Mackey v. Thiel*, (1968) 262 Cal. App. 2d 362. But the California Supreme Court has been clear that charter cities can be subject to state laws that concern the regulation of municipal affairs when that legislation is a matter of "statewide concern." *California Fed. Savings & Loan Assn. v. City of Los Angeles* (1991) 54 Cal.3d 1; *State Building & Construction Trades Council of California v. City of Vista* (2012) 54 Cal.4th 547. The Court has explained that the Legislature may legislate as to matters of statewide concern and, if the statute is not overbroad, then the conflicting charter city law "ceases to be a 'municipal affair' pro tanto and the Legislature is not prohibited by Article XI, Section 5(a), from addressing the statewide dimension by its own tailored enactments." *California Fed. Savings, supra*, 54 Cal.3d at 17. "[G]eneral law prevails over local enactments of a chartered city, even in regard to matters which would otherwise be deemed to be strictly municipal affairs, where the subject matter of the general law is of statewide concern." *People ex rel. Seal Beach Police Officers Assn. v. City of Seal Beach* (1984) 36 Cal.3d 591, 600. *See also Baggett v. Gates* (1982) 32 Cal.3d 128, 136 ["As to matters which are of statewide concern, however, home rule charter cities remain subject to and controlled by applicable general state laws regardless of the provisions of their charters"].



Ensuring that election districts in large cities are fairly drawn likely would be regarded by the courts as a matter of “statewide concern.” The California Supreme Court has developed a four-part test for determining the validity of state laws regulating charter cities

1. If the affected activity is a “municipal affair,”
2. Whether there is an actual conflict between the provisions of local governance and the state law,
3. Whether the state law addresses a matter of “statewide concern” and
4. Whether the law is narrowly tailored to avoid unnecessary interference with local governance.

*City of Vista, supra*, 54 Cal.4th at 556; *California Fed. Savings, supra*, 54 Cal.3d at 16–17. The Court has been explicit that finding that an activity is a “municipal affair” is not decisive and does not automatically preclude state regulation. *People ex rel. Seal Beach Police Officers Assn. v. City of Seal Beach* (1984) 36 Cal.3d 591, 600.

SB 52 is intended to ensure that large cities use a procedure for drawing election districts that is similar to that used for elections for the California legislature and for the United States House of Representatives. These uses of independent districting commissions reflects an important statewide policy against partisan gerrymandering and for impartially drawn election districts. Thus, under clearly established law, I believe that SB 52 involves a matter of statewide concern, is constitutional, and should be upheld by the courts.

Please let me know if I can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

s/

Erwin Chemerinsky

**Introduced by Senator Durazo**

(Principal coauthor: Assembly Member Wendy Carrillo)

**(Coauthors: Senators Caballero, Gonzalez, and Menjivar)**

(Coauthors: Assembly Members Mike Fong, Friedman, Jones-Sawyer, Reyes, Santiago, Schiavo, and Zbur)

December 5, 2022

---

---

An act to add Article 3 (commencing with Section 21700) to Chapter 7 of Division 21 of the Elections Code, relating to elections.

legislative counsel's digest

SB 52, as amended, Durazo. ~~City of Los Angeles Citizens Redistricting Commission. Redistricting: large charter cities.~~

Existing law requires the city council for a charter city that elects its city council using district-based elections, such as the City of Los Angeles, *elections* to adopt new city council district boundaries following each federal decennial census. Existing law requires the city council to adopt the new boundaries using specified criteria, and by a specified deadline, unless the charter city has adopted different redistricting criteria or a different deadline by ordinance or in its city charter.

This bill would ~~establish the City of Los Angeles Citizens Redistricting Commission to adjust the district boundaries for the Los Angeles City Council. The commission would consist of 24 members who meet specified qualifications. require a charter city with a population of at least 2,500,000 people to establish a citizens redistricting commission to adjust the district boundaries for the city council.~~ The bill would require the commission to adjust the boundaries

of the city council districts in accordance with specified criteria and adopt a redistricting plan *following each federal decennial census* in accordance with specified deadlines. By increasing the duties on local officials, the bill would impose a state-mandated local program.

This bill would make legislative findings and declarations as to the necessity of a special statute for ~~the City of Los Angeles~~ *charter cities with a population of at least 2,500,000 people.*

The California Constitution requires the state to reimburse local agencies and school districts for certain costs mandated by the state. Statutory provisions establish procedures for making that reimbursement.

This bill would provide that, if the Commission on State Mandates determines that the bill contains costs mandated by the state, reimbursement for those costs shall be made pursuant to the statutory provisions noted above.

Vote: majority. Appropriation: no. Fiscal committee: yes.  
State-mandated local program: yes.

*The people of the State of California do enact as follows:*

1 SECTION 1. Article 3 (commencing with Section 21700) is  
2 added to Chapter 7 of Division 21 of the Elections Code, to read:

3

4 Article 3. ~~City of Los Angeles Citizens Redistricting~~  
5 ~~Commission~~ *Citizens Redistricting Commissions in Large Charter*  
6 *Cities*

7

8 21700. *The Legislature finds and declares all of the following:*

9 (a) *It is in the best interest of the State of California that*  
10 *redistricting for elected officials' districts is done in a transparent*  
11 *and unbiased manner that best accounts for the diversity and best*  
12 *interests of the state's population.*

13 (b) *With the passing of Proposition 11 in 2008, California has*  
14 *experienced the continued adoption of independent redistricting*  
15 *commissions to establish elected officials' districts for federal and*  
16 *state elected offices.*

17 (c) *The adoption of independent redistricting commissions in*  
18 *California has been in response to an increased need by the public*  
19 *to ensure that ongoing redistricting processes for elected officials'*  
20 *districts is done without the influence of bias or individual interests*

1 *and upholds the best interests of the community and the critical*  
2 *standards of the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965.*

3 *(d) Due to recent developments, the state has taken an increased*  
4 *interest in seeing the adoption of more independent redistricting*  
5 *commissions for local redistricting, including for cities with a*  
6 *large population.*

7 *(e) The state's interest in ensuring that cities with a large*  
8 *population adopt an independent redistricting process is*  
9 *principally based on how these local entities serve as immediate*  
10 *stewards for the well-being and prosperity of the communities they*  
11 *represent.*

12 *(f) Moreover, cities serve as an agent of the state, overseeing*  
13 *the distribution of public resources to finance critical public*  
14 *services such as housing, homelessness prevention, and utility*  
15 *relief.*

16 *(g) In addition, among the most crucial aspects for why the*  
17 *adoption of an independent redistricting commission is necessary*  
18 *is that it contributes significantly to how a city can sustain a*  
19 *longstanding level of trust among the elected officials and the*  
20 *communities that they represent, which not only applies to the*  
21 *redistricting process, but carries over into the entirety of the roles*  
22 *and responsibilities that the city government carries out for its*  
23 *constituency.*

24 *(h) For cities of a certain population, the magnitude of*  
25 *responsibility to uphold the community well-being, effectively*  
26 *oversee the distribution of resources, and sustain general public*  
27 *trust is elevated to a high degree.*

28 *(i) Recent developments and revelations regarding the*  
29 *redistricting process for the Los Angeles City Council serve as*  
30 *example of the aforementioned issues. The people of the City of*  
31 *Los Angeles have lost confidence in the existing redistricting*  
32 *process overseen by the Los Angeles City Council, which has had*  
33 *continuous, serious, reverberating impacts on the ability of the*  
34 *city council to serve the community at large.*

35 *(j) The situation with the Los Angeles City Council presents a*  
36 *clear need for an independent redistricting process to be adopted*  
37 *for cities with a large population for the reasons described in this*  
38 *section.*

1 ~~21700.~~

2 *21701.* As used in this article, the following terms have the  
3 following meanings:

4 (a) “City council” means the ~~Los Angeles City Council.~~ *city*  
5 *council of a city required to establish a citizens redistricting*  
6 *commission pursuant to Section 21702.*

7 (b) “Commission” means the ~~Citizens Redistricting Commission~~  
8 ~~in the City of Los Angeles~~ *a citizens redistricting commission*  
9 ~~established pursuant to Section 21701.~~ *21702.*

10 (c) “Immediate family member” means a spouse, child, in-law,  
11 parent, or sibling.

12 ~~21701. There is, in the City of Los Angeles, a Citizens~~  
13 ~~Redistricting Commission.~~

14 *21702. (a) A charter city with a population of at least*  
15 *2,500,000 people, which has a city charter that does not establish*  
16 *an independent redistricting commission responsible for adopting*  
17 *boundaries for all of the council districts of the city, shall establish*  
18 *a citizens redistricting commission pursuant to this article.*

19 *(b) A commission established pursuant to subdivision (a) shall*  
20 *adopt boundaries for the city council districts pursuant to this*  
21 *article until the charter city amends its city charter to establish*  
22 *an independent redistricting commission.*

23 ~~21702. (a) The selection process is designed to produce a~~  
24 ~~commission that is independent from the influence of the city~~  
25 ~~council and reasonably representative of the city’s diversity.~~

26 *21703. (a) The commission shall be created no later than*  
27 *December 31 in each year ending in the number zero.*

28 *(b) The selection process is designed to produce a commission*  
29 *that is independent from the influence of the city council and*  
30 *reasonably representative of the city’s diversity.*

31 ~~(b) The commission shall consist of 24 members.~~

32 *(c) The total number of members on the commission shall be*  
33 *nine more than the total number of city council districts. The*  
34 *political party preferences of the commission members, as shown*  
35 *on the members’ most recent affidavits of registration, shall be as*  
36 *proportional as possible to the total number of voters who are*  
37 *registered with each political party in the City of Los Angeles,*  
38 *city, or who decline to state or do not indicate a party preference,*  
39 *as determined by registration at the most recent statewide election.*  
40 *However, the political party preferences of the commission*

1 members are not required to be exactly the same as the proportion  
2 of political party preferences among the registered voters of the  
3 city. At least one commission member shall reside in each of the  
4 ~~15~~ existing city council districts.

5 (e)

6 (d) Each commission member shall meet all of the following  
7 qualifications:

8 (1) Be a resident of the ~~City of Los Angeles~~ *city*.

9 (2) Be a voter who has been continuously registered in the ~~City~~  
10 ~~of Los Angeles~~ *city* with the same political party or unaffiliated  
11 with a political party and who has not changed political party  
12 affiliation for five or more years immediately preceding the date  
13 of the person's appointment to the commission.

14 (3) Have voted in at least one of the last three statewide elections  
15 immediately preceding the person's application to be a member  
16 of the commission.

17 (4) Within the 10 years immediately preceding the date of  
18 application to the commission, neither the applicant, nor an  
19 immediate family member of the applicant, has done any of the  
20 following:

21 (A) Been appointed to, elected to, or have been a candidate for  
22 office at the local, state, or federal level representing the ~~City of~~  
23 ~~Los Angeles~~ *city*, including as a member of the city council.

24 (B) Served as an employee of, or paid consultant for, an elected  
25 representative at the local, state, or federal level representing the  
26 ~~City of Los Angeles~~ *city*.

27 (C) Served as an employee of, or paid consultant for, a candidate  
28 for office at the local, state, or federal level representing the ~~City~~  
29 ~~of Los Angeles~~ *city*.

30 (D) Served as an officer, employee, or paid consultant of a  
31 political party or as an appointed member of a political party central  
32 committee.

33 (E) Been a registered state or local lobbyist.

34 (5) Possess experience that demonstrates analytical skills  
35 relevant to the redistricting process and voting rights, and possess  
36 an ability to comprehend and apply the applicable state and federal  
37 legal requirements.

38 (6) Possess experience that demonstrates an ability to be  
39 impartial.

1 (7) Possess experience that demonstrates an appreciation for  
2 the diverse demographics and geography of the ~~City of Los~~  
3 ~~Angeles~~. *city*.

4 ~~(d)~~

5 (e) An interested person meeting the qualifications specified in  
6 subdivision ~~(e)~~ (d) may submit an application to the city elections  
7 official to be considered for membership on the commission. The  
8 city elections official shall review the applications and eliminate  
9 applicants who do not meet the specified qualifications.

10 ~~(e)~~

11 (f) (1) From the pool of qualified applicants, the city elections  
12 official shall select 60 of the most qualified applicants, taking into  
13 account the requirements described in subdivision ~~(b)~~ (c). The  
14 city elections official shall make public the names of the 60 most  
15 qualified applicants for at least 30 days. The city elections official  
16 shall not communicate with a member of the city council, or an  
17 agent for a member of the city council, about any matter related  
18 to the nomination process or applicants before the publication of  
19 the list of the 60 most qualified applicants.

20 (2) During the period described in paragraph (1), the city  
21 elections official may eliminate any of the previously selected  
22 applicants if the city elections official becomes aware that the  
23 applicant does not meet the qualifications specified in subdivision  
24 ~~(e)~~ (d).

25 ~~(f)~~

26 (g) (1) After complying with the requirements of subdivision  
27 ~~(e)~~, (f), the city elections official shall create a subpool for each  
28 of the ~~15~~ city council districts.

29 (2) (A) At a regularly scheduled meeting of the city council,  
30 the ~~Los Angeles City Controller~~ *city controller* shall conduct a  
31 random drawing to select one commissioner from each of the ~~15~~  
32 subpools established by the city elections official.

33 (B) After completing the random drawing pursuant to  
34 subparagraph (A), at the same meeting of the board, the ~~Los~~  
35 ~~Angeles City Controller~~ *city controller* shall conduct a random  
36 drawing from all of the remaining applicants, without respect to  
37 subpools, to select six additional commissioners.

38 ~~(g)~~

39 (h) (1) The ~~24~~ commissioners selected pursuant to subdivision  
40 ~~(f)~~ (g) shall review the remaining names in the subpools of

1 applicants and shall appoint three additional applicants to the  
2 commission.

3 (2) The three appointees shall be chosen based on relevant  
4 experience, analytical skills, and ability to be impartial, and to  
5 ensure that the commission reflects the city’s diversity, including  
6 racial, ethnic, geographic, and gender diversity. However, formulas  
7 or specific ratios shall not be applied for this purpose. The ~~21~~  
8 commissioners shall also consider political party preference,  
9 selecting applicants so that the political party preference of the  
10 members of the commission complies with subdivision ~~(b)~~ (c).

11 ~~21703.~~

12 21704. (a) A commission member shall apply this article in a  
13 manner that is impartial and that reinforces public confidence in  
14 the integrity of the redistricting process.

15 (b) The term of office of each member of the commission  
16 expires upon the appointment of the first member of the succeeding  
17 commission.

18 (c) ~~Thirteen~~ *More than half of the* members of the commission  
19 shall constitute a quorum. ~~Thirteen or more affirmative votes shall~~  
20 ~~be required for any official action. Any official action shall require~~  
21 ~~affirmative votes by more than half of the members of the~~  
22 ~~commission.~~

23 (d) (1) The commission shall not retain a consultant who would  
24 not be qualified as an applicant pursuant to paragraph (4) of  
25 subdivision ~~(e)~~ (d) of Section ~~21702~~ 21703.

26 (2) For purposes of this subdivision, “consultant” means a  
27 person, whether or not compensated, retained to advise the  
28 commission or a commission member regarding any aspect of the  
29 redistricting process.

30 (e) Each commission member shall be a designated employee  
31 for purposes of the conflict of interest code adopted by the ~~City~~  
32 ~~of Los Angeles~~ city pursuant to Article 3 (commencing with  
33 Section 87300) of Chapter 7 of Title 9 of the Government Code.

34 ~~21704.~~

35 21705. (a) The commission shall establish single-member  
36 districts for the city council pursuant to a mapping process using  
37 the following criteria as set forth in the following order of priority:

38 (1) Districts shall comply with the United States Constitution  
39 and each district shall have a reasonably equal population with  
40 other districts of the city council, except where deviation is required

1 to comply with the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 (52 U.S.C.  
2 Sec. 10101 et seq.) or allowable by law.

3 (2) Districts shall comply with the federal Voting Rights Act  
4 of 1965 (52 U.S.C. Sec. 10101 et seq.).

5 (3) Districts shall be geographically contiguous.

6 (4) The geographic integrity of any local neighborhood or local  
7 community of interest shall be respected in a manner that  
8 minimizes its division to the extent possible without violating the  
9 requirements of paragraphs (1) to (3), inclusive. A community of  
10 interest is a contiguous population that shares common social and  
11 economic interests that should be included within a single district  
12 for purposes of its effective and fair representation. Communities  
13 of interest shall not include relationships with political parties,  
14 incumbents, or political candidates.

15 (5) To the extent practicable, and where this does not conflict  
16 with paragraphs (1) to (4), inclusive, districts shall be drawn to  
17 encourage geographical compactness such that nearby areas of  
18 population are not bypassed for more distant areas of population.

19 (b) The place of residence of any incumbent or political  
20 candidate shall not be considered in the creation of a map. Districts  
21 shall not be drawn for purposes of favoring or discriminating  
22 against an incumbent, political candidate, or political party.

23 (c) (1) The commission shall comply with the Ralph M. Brown  
24 Act (Chapter 9 (commencing with Section 54950) of Part 1 of  
25 Division 2 of Title 5 of the Government Code).

26 (2) Before the commission draws a map, the commission shall  
27 conduct at least seven public hearings, to take place over a period  
28 of no fewer than 30 days.

29 (3) After the commission draws a draft map, the commission  
30 shall do both of the following:

31 (A) Post the map for public comment on the *city's* internet  
32 ~~website of the City of Los Angeles.~~ *website.*

33 (B) Conduct at least two public hearings to take place over a  
34 period of no fewer than 30 days.

35 (4) (A) The commission shall establish and make available to  
36 the public a calendar of all public hearings described in paragraphs  
37 (2) and (3). Hearings shall be scheduled at various times and days  
38 of the week to accommodate a variety of work schedules and to  
39 reach as large an audience as possible.

1 (B) Notwithstanding Section 54954.2 of the Government Code,  
2 the commission shall post the agenda for the public hearings  
3 described in paragraphs (2) and (3) at least seven days before the  
4 hearings. The agenda for a meeting required by paragraph (3) shall  
5 include a copy of the draft map.

6 (5) (A) The commission shall arrange for the live translation  
7 of a hearing held pursuant to this article in an applicable language  
8 if a request for translation is made at least 24 hours before the  
9 hearing.

10 (B) For purposes of this paragraph, an “applicable language”  
11 means a language for which the number of residents of the ~~City~~  
12 ~~of Los Angeles~~ city who are members of a language minority is  
13 greater than or equal to 3 percent of the total voting age residents  
14 of the city.

15 (6) The commission shall take steps to encourage city residents  
16 to participate in the redistricting public review process. These steps  
17 may include:

18 (A) Providing information through media, social media, and  
19 public service announcements.

20 (B) Coordinating with community organizations.

21 (C) Posting information on the city’s internet website ~~of the~~  
22 ~~City of Los Angeles~~ that explains the redistricting process and  
23 includes a notice of each public hearing and the procedures for  
24 testifying during a hearing or submitting written testimony directly  
25 to the commission.

26 (7) The city council shall take all steps necessary to ensure that  
27 a complete and accurate computerized database is available for  
28 redistricting, and that procedures are in place to provide to the  
29 public ready access to redistricting data and computer software  
30 equivalent to what is available to the commission members.

31 (8) The city council shall provide for reasonable funding and  
32 staffing for the commission.

33 (9) All records of the commission relating to redistricting, and  
34 all data considered by the commission in drawing a draft map or  
35 the final map, are public records.

36 (d) (1) The commission shall adopt a redistricting plan adjusting  
37 the boundaries of the city council districts and shall file the plan  
38 with the city elections official before August 15 of the year  
39 following the year in which each decennial federal census is taken.

1 (2) The plan shall be effective 30 days after it is filed with the  
2 city elections official.

3 (3) The plan shall be subject to referendum in the same manner  
4 as ordinances.

5 (4) The commission shall issue, with the final map, a report that  
6 explains the basis on which the commission made its decisions in  
7 achieving compliance with the criteria described in subdivisions  
8 (a) and (b).

9 ~~21705.~~

10 21706. A commission member shall be ineligible for a period  
11 of five years beginning from the date of appointment to hold  
12 elective public office at the federal, state, county, or city level in  
13 this state. A commission member shall be ineligible for a period  
14 of three years beginning from the date of appointment to hold  
15 appointive federal, state, or local public office, to serve as paid  
16 staff for, or as a paid consultant to, the Board of Equalization,  
17 Congress, the Legislature, or any individual legislator, or to register  
18 as a federal, state or local lobbyist in this state.

19 SEC. 2. The Legislature finds and declares that a special statute  
20 is necessary and that a general statute cannot be made applicable  
21 within the meaning of Section 16 of Article IV of the California  
22 Constitution because of the unique circumstances involved in  
23 redistricting for ~~the Los Angeles City Council.~~ *a charter city with*  
24 *a population of at least 2,500,000 people.*

25 SEC. 3. If the Commission on State Mandates determines that  
26 this act contains costs mandated by the state, reimbursement to  
27 local agencies and school districts for those costs shall be made  
28 pursuant to Part 7 (commencing with Section 17500) of Division  
29 4 of Title 2 of the Government Code.

O

# Los Angeles Times

## Editorial: Not a ‘power grab.’ State lawmakers can help keep L.A. on the path of meaningful reform

BY THE TIMES EDITORIAL BOARD

FEB. 9, 2023 12:58 PM PT

Can members of the Los Angeles City Council be trusted to ignore their own political interests and hand over power to an independent redistricting commission?

Perhaps. With the cloud of scandal still hanging over City Hall and overwhelming public support for an independent commission that would draw City Council and school board district boundaries without political interference, city leaders are under pressure to put good government policy over personal agendas.

But a bill being carried by Sen. María Elena Durazo (D-Los Angeles) is a valuable backstop if the City Council can’t — or won’t — fully relinquish power. Senate Bill 52 would establish an independent citizen redistricting commission for the city, modeled on L.A. County’s and California’s independent commissions.

Replacing L.A.’s politically tainted redistricting process was a good idea

even before a recording caught then-Council President Nury Martinez, former Councilmember Gil Cedillo and current Councilmember Kevin de León scheming to draw district lines to help themselves and hurt their foes. But calls to enact truly independent redistricting have been ignored in City Hall for decades, which is why Durazo began looking at a bill to impose it shortly after the leaked audio scandal.

There is precedent for this kind of pressure. The Legislature passed a bill in 2016 requiring L.A. County to enact an independent commission — though there is legal debate over whether the state can force the same change on a charter city like L.A. that has more independence.

Durazo’s bill has problematic details, such as calling for 24 commissioners, which is nearly double the number on the county and state panels. A commission of two dozen people is just too large and unwieldy. But SB 52 is a first draft, and Durazo’s office said

they're working on amendments and consulting redistricting experts, including UC Berkeley Law School Dean Erwin Chemerinsky, who helped draft L.A.'s last charter update in 1999. So it was a bit premature when, last week, Council President Paul Krekorian came out in strong opposition to SB 52. His office called it a "power grab by the state Legislature." On Monday, the council's Ad Hoc Committee on City Governance Reform unanimously voted to have the city officially oppose the bill.

Krekorian's argument is that the City Council is already evaluating options for creating an independent redistricting commission with public participation, and Los Angeles voters "deserve to decide the terms of their own redistricting process." That's true. A bill passed by the Legislature and signed by the governor would bypass meaningful public input and a local vote.

There is real momentum for change within Los Angeles. Community groups are organizing for major governance reform, including expanding the City Council to improve representation and giving the Ethics Commission more independence. A group of academic leaders that includes Pat Brown Institute Executive Director Raphael Sonenshein, who also helped write the 1999 charter update, is working on its own set of

recommendations. There is time to develop a well-rounded reform package for the ballot in 2024.

However, despite the pledges by Krekorian and other council members, there's no guarantee the City Council will end up putting an independent redistricting charter amendment on the ballot. And even if it does, there's no guarantee that the council's proposal will be the right or best version. There are plenty of examples of city leaders writing bad or self-serving charter amendments in the name of governance reform.

Besides, the City Council shouldn't be tinkering too much with the structure and rules of a commission. "There is a really well established and very successful model of independent redistricting," said Jonathan Mehta Stein, executive director of California Common Cause, which is following L.A.'s process. "If they mess with that, they're going to lose the trust of voters."

Are we being pessimistic? Perhaps. But independent redistricting is such an overdue and important reform of L.A. city government that we'd prefer to hope for the best and prepare for the worst — and have SB 52 ready just in case.

