

RICHMOND CITY
DEMOCRATIC COMMITTEE



December 10, 2021

Dear President Newbille and members of Council,

We have recently learned that the City Council is considering an expedited paper to establish the process and criteria for redistricting in the city. We have concerns that this process was not firmly established months ago, will not be transparent, will place an undue burden on our Office of Elections, and now is being rushed to comply with constitutionally mandated deadlines that the city simply cannot meet. In the past, redistricting has been a murky process with little public input. It is the duty of the City Council to govern better.

As it stands now, it seems that members of Council will be able to draw lines behind closed doors. This is unacceptable. We have several suggestions to ensure a fair and transparent public process.

First, the Council must slow down this process. Residents need time to meaningfully engage in reapportionment, and that engagement cannot be curtailed because Council has not acted expeditiously in determining their process for redistricting. The resolution for redistricting was only made available to the public this past Monday and is being considered for adoption this Monday. The community has not had sufficient time to review the resolution and give appropriate feedback.

Second, the enabling legislation must include requirements that make the new districts discernible for residents and should mandate both compactness and contiguity. This will aid in ensuring that communities of interest are kept together and that residents can easily identify which district they belong to.

Third, new maps must be drawn publicly with input from residents and interested community organizations. At a minimum, City Council should establish an ad-hoc committee that includes Council and relevant city staff, and such committee must meet publicly and draw maps live. In these meetings, there must be ample opportunity for public comment and community engagement.

Richmond is at a critical moment in its history. The census has revealed monumental demographic shifts, and the City must be deliberate in crafting new districts that serve our residents. We must cast off the old way of doing things and create a better process that serves all Richmond residents.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Nolan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Jamie Nolan
Chair, Richmond City Democratic Committee