

## 2019 ISSUE PAPER: CENSUS AND REDISTRICTING

### Position statement

Census: The census should count everyone, be transparent, easy and accessible, and reflect the diversity of our communities.

Redistricting: Support redistricting processes and enforceable standards that promote fair and effective representation at all levels of government with maximum opportunity for participation.

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Every 10 years, the U.S. Census Bureau carries out a count, called a Census, of the nation's residents. The data collected is used for decisions that impact every community. The decisions include redistricting, enforcement of civil rights laws, education, infrastructure, medical insurance and much more. Voting districts are determined by the total number of people living in an area, not just the number of adults, voters or citizens. Ensuring sure that all people are counted in 2020, could dramatically change the ways in which the districts are drawn.

The boundary drawing process, called redistricting, determines the political representation of all communities. The formation of these congressional and legislative districts is fundamental to the equity of our voting system. How and where district lines are drawn in 2021 will determine how strong a voice each voter has in coming elections. Stories of partisan and racial gerrymandering, of overwhelming majorities in districts and of "trifecta" control in the states elevate concerns about how districts influence the effectiveness of our democracy. In addition, The U.S. Supreme Court's indecision in June 2018 on Gill v. Whitford, the challenge to Wisconsin's legislative maps, has made redistricting reform even more important. Advocating for fair and transparent redistricting is timely and pivotal.

After decades of intense battles Washington created a five-member Redistricting Commission in 1983. Four of the commissioners are chosen by the majority and minority parties of the chambers of the State Legislature. These four then choose a non-voting administrative chair. This system produces districts that favor incumbents, seems to have the Democrats and Republicans splitting district control and seems to result in legislative chambers with small majorities.

### Summary of Issues for the 2019 Legislative Session

1. Allocate additional money from Washington State to support the Census process; augmenting the federal funds from the U.S. Census Bureau.
2. Enhance administrative requirements of the Washington State Redistricting Commission by moving commissioner appointment dates sooner, requiring more public access and increasing transparency.
3. Change the compositions of the Redistricting Commission to include additional representation of people outside the dominate parties, from regions outside Puget Sound region, and from women and people of color.

### Census

The Census Bureau has been underfunded for the 2020 cycle. There have been many delays in planning and staffing including the absence of a U.S. Senate confirmed Bureau director since mid-2017. Less staff and poor planning could lead to a less accurate count. The Census has traditionally undercounted certain communities including racial minorities, lower income persons, undocumented immigrants, Native

Americans, LGBTQ individuals, homeless persons, and those with severe distrust of the government. These are the very communities that need equal representation. An inaccurate count could risk further disenfranchisement.

For the first time in 70 years, the census has added a question to every household asking if you are a U.S. citizen. In the current political environment, this citizenship question could cause panic and cause hundreds of thousands of people in our communities to avoid the census for fear of being targeted by this administration. The cost to organize to alleviate response barriers will be high. With little hope that the federal government will adequately fund the 2020 Census, it falls to the state to insure our communities are accurately counted.

### Redistricting

Washington is one of only seven states that has a redistricting commission independent from direct legislative control. Our bi-partisan commission requires three of four members to agree. Over the last three decades, this process has resulted in little controversy but also created many noncompetitive districts and resulted in close majority control in our legislative chambers. We believe that while our process eliminates extreme partisan gerrymandering, it can be improved to increase citizen trust, transparency, representation and effectiveness.

- *Public Participation*

While past commissions held public meetings, we believe public access would be enhanced by:

1. Producing recommendations including timing of appointments, process of appointments, training, public negotiations, and commission communications.
2. Working with community partners to understand needs of ethnic communities

- *Transparency*

Transparency in the selection & process increases trust and encourages compromise.

1. Changing specific public disclosure rules for the commission
2. Changing specific RCW as guidance for commission
3. Increasing specific technology requirements to allow public testimony and maps

- *Representativeness*

Elected officials need to represent peoples' values and experiences. We can improve representativeness by:

1. Exploring communities of interest and understanding how they could define districts
2. Screening a slate of qualified Commissioner candidates to the political parties
3. Changing commission structure via constitutional amendment to add diversity

- *Administration Improvements*

We believe that improvements in the administration practices and processes of the commission would increase efficiency and effectiveness. These include:

1. Appointing commissioners earlier so they can attend trainings and complete more tasks
2. Prescreening of staff applicants,
3. Adding a Communications Director
4. Including auditors earlier in the process

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