

January 31, 2022

Open Letter to DeKalb State Legislators and Board of Commissioners

DeKalb Citizens Advocacy Council believes that transparency is essential for elected officials to fulfill their obligations to constituents. Voters need to know what is being done and why. We are alarmed and mystified that this requirement is being ignored in the re-drawing of County Commission district lines, as required by the 2020 Census.

We see a disturbing pattern of elected officials not being willing to share their work in a timely fashion. In late 2021, the Board of Commissioners worked quietly until almost the last minute before discussing proposed population modifications. We and others insisted there be public involvement before final proposals were made. The Commission ultimately shared their proposed maps, which made small changes in each existing district to reflect population shifts and retained the two super districts.

If the Delegation is trying to respond to the 2020 Census, which does require some population adjustments, then the maps submitted by the Board of Commissioners to the state's Local Reapportionment Office (LRO) and recently returned by that office to the Delegation with minor changes should be the starting point for discussion. At this time the public has not seen the maps returned by the LRO.

While it is the role of the Delegation, not the Board of Commissioners, to put forth the maps to the General Assembly, we believe the maps that are offered by the Board traditionally have been largely respected. And yet, according to the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* (January 26, 2022), Senator Emanuel Jones is proposing to present a significantly changed map, also without any public input. His proposed map would eliminate super districts with little, if any, public discussion. This is extremely disturbing.

In 1979, the last time the County Charter was reviewed in its entirety, the Government Reorganization Commission spent months studying the county's form of government, powers and duties, and departmental structures. Their report was the "result of the well-reasoned and thoroughly debated efforts" of the Commission. The current charter, under which proposed district changes are authorized, came from that work. We believe a similar serious study of the County Charter with public input should now occur before making major changes in the lines of representation. It is unacceptable to make those alterations without allowing enough time and information for public study and discussion.

The deadline for local redistricting is February 18 to allow counties to make the updates prior to candidate qualifying in early March. Given this challenging time frame, it is impossible to have a similar meaningful and transparent decision-making process about the Commission's composition. We continue to be extremely concerned about the continued lack of transparency and failure to obtain meaningful public feedback before making major decisions.

Without understanding the motivating factors or seeing the LRO's or Senator Jones's maps, we must oppose what we believe will be a serious disruption of the DeKalb governing authority and a violation of the covenant between citizens and their representatives: that elected officials will conduct the people's business with openness and transparency.

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