



Statement on Redistricting to the Manatee County Commissioners from the Manatee County Democratic Party October 19, 2021

For too long, the setting of political districts has been used to manipulate elections to benefit political parties rather than voters. While the Manatee County Commissioners have the authority to set the new boundaries, your authority should not be abused in order to unjustly disenfranchise voters with whom you disagree. Do not silence the will and the voice of voters by denying this county fair representation on this commission. This process can only work if all commissioners are willing to make the tough decisions that lead to creating a fair map. We know this process is not easy, and the end result requires compromise.

Setting the new boundaries for the Manatee County Commissioner Districts is a process that must be undertaken with great care. A Florida state legislator once said, redistricting is the confluence of politics, law, and common sense. We add to that mix public involvement and sincere transparency.

Under state law, you have the responsibility to adjust for uneven growth rates in different parts of Manatee County. As staff has instructed this body, careful consideration must be given to maintaining

- Near equality in population within the boundaries of commissioner districts;
- Identifiable communities of interests;
- Historical, natural and man-made identifiable boundaries for the districts;
- The integrity of the municipalities;
- Previously established districts; and
- Other important factors permitted by law.

As you and the county staff undertake this important task, we call on you to recognize and adhere to the highest standards of integrity in order to protect and strengthen our representative democracy rather than protecting your own position of power.

We strongly urge you to:

- Uphold the standards of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, Section 2, and instruction from the U.S. Department of Justice and create districts that will not “improperly dilute minorities' voting power.” Census data tells us District 2 has the highest concentration of minority voters. It is a compact and contiguous district, and its boundaries should not be greatly tampered with. It must not be redrawn to deny voters equal opportunity to participate in the political process and elect representatives of their choice.
- Conduct an analysis of any plan's effect on minority communities. Staff has already prepared demographic data sheets showing population, income, education, and employment. Adding the easily attainable census data on ethnic breakdown should not be a problem and would be instructive to all involved. Update these demographic summaries as part of your ongoing public information process.

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- Be inclusive of public input as you move forward in setting new districts. Provide the public with information, tools, and, most importantly, adequate advance notice of proposed actions so voters can make informed comments. We have already seen this body change its agenda at the last minute on a different issue, in order to confuse and restrict public comment. Do not attempt that same late-night, sleight of hand maneuver in the redistricting process.
- Draw new boundaries in a way that does not favor or disfavor a political party or a narrow political agenda. This process is not about protecting the power structure of the commission or developer interests. It is about fair representation based on Census data and the creation of compact, balanced, and common sense boundaries.

We call on you to trust the voters and support the creation of districts that fairly and accurately represent all communities. Such action will be a sign of strength on your part, not a sign of weakness.