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Racial Equity Redistricting Principles

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Introduction

Following the 2010 Census, Minnesota is undergoing a once-per-decade redistricting process to redraw the congressional districts and legislative districts to reflect changes in the State's population. Redistricting plays an important role in our state and communities. Using new census numbers, districts are adjusted and redrawn in order to make sure every district has a nearly-equal amount of people. Additionally, using the census numbers and districts, funding formulas are developed for state-money allocation for projects and services.

How districts are drawn has significant effect on outcomes for communities. Districts can be drawn in ways that augment the power of one group or political party and diminish the power of another. They can also be drawn in ways that correct historic disparities and act as a tool for increasing racial equity. For example, redistricting can increase the number of legislators of color to parity and increase the voting power of communities of color, protect a community of interest, and involve diverse communities in the process.

As the state legislature and the public debates the proposals emerging from House and Senate Republicans, there are important things to consider in order for redistricting to be equitable for all Minnesotans. The Organizing Apprenticeship Project and its partners have developed principles for racial equity to help community leaders and decision makers assess the racial equity impact of the proposals. We offer four principles that can be used by community leaders and decision makers at every level to guide the redrawing process and make it more equitable.

1. Include Minnesotans in Constructing Solutions on Redrawing the Lines. In Minnesota's history, redistricting has been a contentious process, and most of the recent attempts resulted in the judiciary drawing district maps when legislators drew partisan lines. OAP supports a process that removes the partisanship of redistricting. The process must be transparent and one that encourages and solicits community input. Citizens will be impacted by changing districts and deserve an opportunity to voice their thoughts on redistricting proposals. Closed-door decision making is not participatory.

2. Uphold Fairer Redistricting by Counting Incarcerated Individuals at their Previous Residence. When the census was undertaken in 2010, incarcerated individuals were counted at prison and not at their residence prior to incarceration. Therefore, communities where prisoners come from and return to are grossly undercounted. At the same time, the prisons

where the prisoners are counted tend to be in areas with mostly white Minnesotans. Because prisoners are not eligible to vote but are counted as regular citizens, these white districts are able to boost their district with ineligible voters. This process leads to three inequitable outcomes. One, legislators from districts encompassing prisons will represent fewer eligible voters than districts without prisons. Some analyses show some legislators represent 4%, or 1,700 voters, less than the ideal district. Two, funding to districts with prisons – which are primarily white districts – is higher per-capita for non-incarcerated citizens than in districts without prisons. Three, funding for districts where prisoners come from and return to is lower per capita. Other states have taken action to reverse this injustice, including New Jersey and Maryland. Legislators in Minnesota have introduced a bill to correct this wrong, but it has not advanced to law. Redistricting must be fairer. We have to count incarcerated individuals at their previous residence.

3. Strengthen the Opportunity to Elect Legislators of Color. The legislature should be as diverse as the State being governed. Currently, legislators of color comprise only 3% of the legislature, but communities of color represent 14.7% of the population. The easiest way to increase the number of legislators of color is to create more districts with the majority of constituents being people of color. Additionally, this goal adheres to the 1965 Voting Rights Act directive to keep communities of interest intact. However, districts must not be drawn so as to diminish the overall power of people of color through a process called “packing.” The 1965 Voting Rights Act must be abided by in the redistricting process.

4. Empower the Vote of Communities of Color. According to OAP’s demographic analysis of its annual Minnesota Legislative Report Card on Racial Equity, people of color become the swing vote when they make up around 14% of a district’s demographics. As the swing vote, legislators look to communities of color in order to stay in office and legislators do better on issues of equity. According to the 2010 census numbers, people of color represent 14.7% of the State. Therefore, when more districts look like the overall demographic makeup of the state, people of color will hold more power. Efforts to empower the vote of communities of color must align with the 1965 Voting Rights Act.