

August 15, 2025

Governor Gavin Newsom
Senate President pro Tempore Mike McGuire
Assembly Speaker Robert Rivas
Assembly Elections Committee Chair Gail Pellerin
Senate Elections and Constitutional Amendments Chair Sabrina Cervantes

Re: California Common Cause Calls for Adoption of our Fairness Criteria in Mid-decade
California Congressional Redistricting

Dear Governor Newsom, Senate pro Tem McGuire, Speaker Rivas, Chair Pellerin, and Chair
Cervantes:

On behalf of California Common Cause, we are writing to express our criteria for analyzing a mid-decade redraw of California's U.S. House map. Common Cause has long been a leader in the movement for people-powered redistricting reform, and we reaffirm our commitment to independent redistricting commissions as the gold standard for fair and representative map drawing. Accordingly, California Common Cause will closely examine the effort by the Legislature and the Governor to change the Congressional districts created by the 2021 California Citizens Redistricting Commission (CCRC) to examine compliance with the fairness criteria adopted by our National Governing Board and provided in this letter.

California Common Cause has worked for decades to make our state's redistricting processes more transparent and representative, including by helping to secure both the creation of the CCRC in 2008 through Proposition 11 and the expansion of the Commission's duties to include Congressional line drawing in 2010 through Proposition 20. Common Cause sought to curb partisan gerrymandering in the U.S. Supreme Court, *Rucho v. Common Cause*, 139 S.Ct. 2484 (2019), and helped craft the Freedom to Vote Act to ban partisan gerrymandering, and we will never stop fighting to ensure that voters have the power to choose their government and not the other way around.

We also recognize that while independent redistricting commissions are the best mechanism we know of for achieving fair representation, they are a means to an end - not the end itself. In the current mid-decade redistricting battle, President Trump and Republican leaders are pursuing a calculated, asymmetric strategy to redraw lines in states like Texas, to lock in unaccountable power and silence voters. This is not an isolated political tactic; it is part of a broader march toward authoritarianism, dismantling people-powered democracy, and stripping away the people's ability to have a political voice in how they are governed. Such attacks undermine all future democracy reforms and subvert democracy itself.

We will not endorse partisan gerrymandering even when its motive is to offset more extreme gerrymandering by a different party. However, a blanket condemnation in this moment would amount to a call for unilateral political disarmament in the face of authoritarian efforts to undermine fair representation and democracy. Therefore, Common Cause will not oppose mid-decade redistricting countermeasures that meet the following fairness criteria:

1. **Proportionality:** Any mid-decade redistricting should be a targeted response proportional to the threat posed by mid-decade gerrymanders in other states.
2. **Public participation:** Any redistricting must include meaningful public participation, whether through ballot initiatives or open public processes.
3. **Racial equity:** Redistricting must not further racial discrimination or dilute the political voice of Black, Latino, Indigenous, Asian American, and Pacific Islander, or other communities of color.
4. **Federal reform:** Leaders pursuing mid-decade redistricting must publicly endorse the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act and the Freedom to Vote Act, including provisions banning mid-decade redistricting and partisan gerrymandering.
5. **Endorsement of independent redistricting:** Leaders pursuing mid-decade redistricting must publicly endorse neutral, fair redistricting systems, such as citizen-led independent redistricting commissions, as the long-term solution.
6. **Time-limited:** Any new redistricting maps must expire following the 2030 Census, which counts all people in our country, and be replaced through the regular decennial redistricting process.

As of the date of this letter, neither the California constitutional amendment and related legislative language needed to enact new Congressional maps nor the proposed maps are publicly available. Although public statements from Governor Newsom and legislative leaders have so far suggested that there will be some opportunity for public comment on the proposed maps and that the CCRC process will be reinstated after the 2030 census, we seek to ensure that the process adheres to the fairness criteria outlined above. To ensure this and preserve California's commitment to full democratic representation, any mid-decade redistricting efforts promulgated by the Legislature should codify these standards.

First, to best ensure that potential California redistricting is **proportional and targeted** to respond to the threat presented by gerrymandering in other states, the proposed constitutional amendment should explicitly state that California's lines will only be redrawn if Texas redraws its lines to expand that state's partisan advantage leading into the 2026 midterm elections. If this trigger is not included in the language presented to voters on the ballot, California is creating a risk of starting the national gerrymandering battle it seeks to neutralize.

Second, for Californians to have a **meaningful opportunity to participate** in the creation of new Congressional maps that may profoundly affect their voting power, every part of the process should center accessibility and transparency. We recommend not only submitting any proposed constitutional amendments to the voters, but also ensuring ample opportunity for the

public to provide feedback on any changes to how their districts are drawn. Allowing robust public input before maps are finalized will increase the chances that the racial equity criterion will be met and help ensure that communities of interest remain whole. Providing funding to the CCRC to meet and provide its own input based on the thousands of comments Californians provided about their communities would also demonstrate a commitment to public participation. Facilitating meaningful public feedback on new maps requires adherence to the language and disability access standards our state typically demands of its electoral systems, as well as adequate voter outreach and education. Similarly, publishing a joint report between the Legislature, Governor's Office, and California Secretary of State's office explaining how and why the proposed districts were redrawn as they were would help improve both public confidence and government accountability.

Third, we also believe that any redrawn maps can and should **do more to protect the rights of underrepresented voters** than comply with the Voting Rights Act (VRA). We strongly recommend that any legislation connected with this redistricting effort adopt as many of the criteria currently outlined in Article XXI, section 2 of the state constitution, including: reasonable population equality, compliance with the VRA, geographic contiguity, geographic integrity of communities of interest, and compactness. The state's current congressional maps, which demonstrate the CCRC's steadfast commitment to effective representation for communities of color, should serve as the foundation for any new redistricting efforts. Beyond this, the latest data should be utilized in mid-decade redistricting to ensure the most accurate representation of voters.

Fourth, to ensure that **people-centered redistricting reforms** are advanced, California's leaders should publicly endorse citizen-led independent redistricting commissions as the long-term solution, specifically endorsing the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act and the Freedom to Vote Act, including provisions banning mid-decade redistricting and partisan gerrymandering. If enacted, these federal reforms would enable voters to sue for vote dilution and vote denial related to districts that are gerrymandered. This would address practices that make it harder for minority-preferred candidates to win and create greater obstacles for minority voters in casting ballots.

Passing a legislative resolution in support of nationwide reforms would be an unequivocal commitment of our state's leaders to the principle that voters, not politicians, should decide who wins elections. Similarly, we are hopeful that in identifying independent redistricting commissions as the "gold standard," Governor Newsom is also committed to signing legislation in the next legislative session that would codify the reforms articulated in AB 1248 (Bryan, 2023) and expand citizen redistricting to local government.

Finally, any **new redistricting maps must explicitly expire after the 2030 Census**. To enable voters to participate in a fully representative democracy, all future redistricting efforts should return to the CCRC and be conducted through the regular decennial redistricting process.

Our position on partisan gerrymandering has not changed, but we recognize that the landscape has. Our democracy is at a crossroads, and Common Cause will meet this moment. We call on the California Legislature and Governor Newsom to think expansively about how to best ensure that all voters can be fully and fairly represented in any mid-decade redistricting effort, and we look forward to discussing further how our recommendations can help achieve that shared goal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Darius L. Kemp".

Darius L. Kemp
Executive Director, California

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dan Vicuña".

Dan Vicuña
Senior Policy Director for Voting and Fair Representation

Cc: Secretary of State Shirley Weber; California AAPI Legislative Caucus Chair Mike Fong; California Latino Legislative Caucus Chair Lena Gonzalez; California Legislative Black Caucus Chair Akilah Weber Pierson; California Legislative Progressive Caucus Chair Alex Lee; and California Legislative Women's Caucus Chair Cecilia Aguiar-Curry