

Monday, September 13, 2021
Shelton City Hall
Reapportionment Committee Public Hearing

Good afternoon distinguished members of the Reapportionment Committee,

My name is Dr. Vanessa Liles and I am here today testifying as a Bridgeport voter, representing my organization PT Partners, a grassroots, resident-led, community organizing non-profit, that aims to rebuild community in PT Barnum Apartments, a low-income public housing development in Bridgeport. I'm also here representing the Unrig Bridgeport coalition, a broad-based coalition working to fix Bridgeport's broken democracy.

Once drawn, our electoral maps determine how we're represented in the government for the next ten years. This means all state and local decisions on [health care](#), jobs, the [environment](#), [education](#), and more must be based on maps that are drawn fairly and accurately, with all voices considered and equitably represented.

In June of 2019, however, the US Supreme Court ruled in *Rucho v. League of Women Voters of North Carolina* that no fair test exists for courts to determine when partisan gerrymandering has gone too far. As a result, federal courts will be hands-off during this redistricting process even when new district lines are drawn to intentionally decrease the voting power of voters based solely on their political party.

Unfortunately in Bridgeport, we know all too well how it feels to be disenfranchised, as our city's democracy has been hijacked to ensure those with power keep it. We know firsthand that democracy dies when partisan players are allowed to make decisions in the dark. .

The General Assembly must establish much better transparency requirements for redistricting. The national organization [RepresentUs](#) (which fights to end corruption in our federal government) assesses the threat of partisan gerrymandering in Connecticut as "High" largely because of the absence of robust transparency measures.

Due to this lack of transparency, voters are in the dark about how districts are drawn. State legislative districts must be within 10% of the ideal population average, which is the state population divided by the number of districts for each body (36 for the State Senate and 151 for the State House). Some districts exceed the ideal while some are below the ideal - yet no one knows how or why this happens.

Finally, when maps are developed, the public should know what considerations- in addition to federal requirements and geographic contiguity- have been used to create districts. The public should know - what conversations have you been having internally about redistricting? What concerns have you all raised among yourselves?

Therefore, in solidarity with the League of Women Voters, we believe the best way to conduct Redistricting is through independent non-partisan special commissions made up of groups and

individuals that are representative of the communities where districts are drawn. Voters should choose their representatives rather than legislators choosing their voters.

On behalf of the Unrig Bridgeport coalition and Bridgeport voters, we ask you today the following questions:

- **Will you introduce state legislation this year to create greater Redistricting transparency?**
- **Will you publicly release your decision-making process into which districts will be above and which will be lower than the ideal population?**
- **Will you publicly release what considerations- in addition to federal requirements and geographic contiguity- you are using to create all districts?**

Connecticut's Redistricting process is largely a game of "insider ball". The long term strategy is we must amend our constitution to remove elected officials from the central role they play. However, it is possible for you - the decennial Connecticut Reapportionment Committee - to lead now on the issues of transparency, accountability, fairness, and equity.

Unrig Bridgeport Coalition Members:

Bridgeport Generation Now Votes

Bridgeport Strong

Connecticut Citizen Action Group

The Greater Bridgeport NAACP

Greater Bridgeport Ed Gomes Black Democratic Club

Make The Road CT Action

PT Partners

SEIU 1199 New England

The Working Families Party – Bridgeport

The Working Families Party – CT