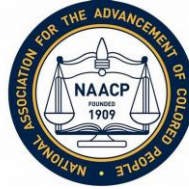




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Leading Advocates and Civil Rights Groups Oppose New Jersey Redistricting Plan that Elevates Partisanship Over People

November 26, 2018—Today, a coalition of leading advocates and civil rights groups opposed a troubling, hyper-partisan proposal to change how New Jersey draws its legislative districts, which would almost certainly result in racially discriminatory maps. The New Jersey Institute for Social Justice, the League of Women Voters of New Jersey, the Brennan Center for Justice, the New Jersey State Conference of the NAACP, and Salvation and Social Justice together opposed SCR43, a proposal that would amend the state constitution to require that districts be drawn based on the share of votes received by each major party in certain high-level statewide elections, thereby threatening to undermine the voting strength of communities of color. The districts drawn under the proposed plan would determine election outcomes for decades to come.

“We are anchored by the fundamental belief that fairly and transparently drawn legislative districts that comply with federal law and preserve communities of interest, particularly communities of color, must be the benchmark of any redistricting process,” said Ryan P. Haygood, President and CEO of the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice (Institute). “SCR43, however, would constitutionalize a redistricting process for New Jersey that elevates partisanship *over* people, and prioritizes ‘competition’ over protecting the ability of communities of color to elect their candidates of choice. We cannot support this proposal. And we urge everyone who cares about the protection of our democracy’s ability to put people first—not partisanship—to join us in opposing SCR43.”

“Requiring commissioners to consider partisan data, past election results and complicated calculations when drawing new maps is nothing more than an attempt by one party to more effectively distribute its votes across the state in order to solidify their power. This is undemocratic. Voters should be picking their politicians, not the other way around,” said Helen Kioukis, Program Associate of the League of Women Voters of New Jersey.

“SCR43 requires that districts be drawn based on partisanship,” said Scott Novakowski, Institute Associate Counsel. “Preserving communities of interest—whether based on shared racial, ethnic, or cultural identity, a common media market, or shared economic interests—is only considered if multiple competing plans meet the partisanship criteria. Our communities deserve better.”

“Attempting to mandate political outcomes is not the best way to reform redistricting—and, in fact, could open the door to gerrymandering. States like California, Colorado, and Michigan have tackled the problem in far simpler ways. It’s better to focus on making sure the process is fair instead of focusing on political outcomes,” said Yurij Rudensky, Redistricting Counsel at the Brennan Center for Justice at the NYU School of Law.

“By focusing on partisanship and treating communities of interest, and communities of color in particular, as an afterthought, the proposed constitutional amendment is an unacceptable step backwards for New Jersey,” said Richard Smith, President of the New Jersey Chapter of the NAACP. “We will not go back. Passage of this proposal will virtually ensure the voting power of communities of color will be diluted for decades to come. We successfully opposed this ill-conceived measure before, and we are doing so again today.”

Rev. Charles Boyer, Director of Salvation and Social Justice said, “It is imperative that any redistricting proposal prioritizes and honors the hard fought sacred vote of people of color. Our vote cannot be diluted in anyway, especially among partisan lines.”

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