

# Getting Involved: Prepare Your Testimony

An important way for your community to have your voices heard during redistricting is by providing testimonies. This information can be presented at public hearings or in meetings with legislators to advocate that your community be kept together. (See **Rules of Redistricting: Communities of Interest**) Use the questions below as prompts to prepare your testimonies.

## INTRODUCTION

Introduce yourself, your organization, and/or coalition.

- Describe yourself, the organizations with which you are working, and with whom you work.
- What are your goals? Keeping your community together, uniting your communities, or recommending a larger map with coalition partners.

Example: “My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I’ve been a resident of [neighborhood, place] for \_\_\_\_ years. I’m here with a group of my neighbors. I would like the [Commission, Committee, etc.] to keep my community together.”

## DESCRIBE A MAP OF YOUR COMMUNITY

Describe the boundaries, significant landmarks, and gathering places.

- What are the streets or boundaries that mark your community borders on each side?
- What are the significant landmarks: rivers, parks, shopping areas, or historic sites, etc.?
- What are the gathering places: shopping districts, schools, community centers, religious places, and social service agencies?
- Do the current political district boundaries divide your community? Or do they keep your community together?

Example: “As you can see on the map that we submitted for our community of interest Riverside South: The northern boundary is the river, the eastern boundary is Highway 10, the southern boundary extends to Main Street, and the western edge goes to the city boundary where we meet the next town. Almansor Park by the river is where the neighbors gather to celebrate... Our community is currently divided into 2 city council districts and represented by two city council members.”

## DESCRIBE YOUR COMMUNITY

Describe your community by including social and economic demographics, and narrative information about its history and culture. Describe what connects the people and why it’s important that they be kept together.

- **Include stories.**
  - Imagine describing your community to a visitor from out of town.
  - Who lives in your community? What kinds of things do they do for a living?
  - Does your neighborhood have celebrations or traditions, like street festivals or parades?
  - Are there important places where people gather, like shopping areas, places of worship, parks or community centers? Is there a place that is the largest employer?
  - What is the history of how your community came together?

Example: “My Little Cambodia neighborhood is where many new immigrants move to first when they come to the city. In the 1980s, it was mostly Southeast Asian. There was a small shopping district where people come in from all over to get Asian groceries and other goods. Along the main road of that area, there is a parade each year celebrating Lunar New Year.”

## DESCRIBE YOUR COMMUNITY (continued)

- **Include data from reliable sources such as the U.S. Census Bureau as another way to describe your community and what neighbors have in common.** This will make the case stronger.
  - What is the average level of education or graduation rates? What is the average income level? Are there common occupations or jobs people have?
  - What kind of housing is common? Single family homes, large apartment buildings? Do people rent or own their homes?
  - Are neighbors mostly immigrants? Is there a common language? How do neighbors rate their level of English?
  - What are the different ancestries, races, and ethnicities of the neighborhood? (Race and ethnicity may be one factor, but it cannot be the predominant reason that a community is unique and needs to be kept united during redistricting.)

Example: “My neighborhood is working class, low to median income families mostly renters. The median household income is \$32,000. Many of our residents moved from the South to this neighborhood to build a new life.”

- **Description of how your community is different or alike from the communities around you**—Highlighting community issues in personal stories and written narratives help demonstrate the importance of having elected officials who understand and respond to community needs. Share stories and data about community concerns and if you feel like your voices have been heard and your needs have been met.
  - Has your community come together to advocate for important services, like more translated information, or health centers in your neighborhood?
  - Have you worked for more recognition or support of your community, like having holidays recognized or historical events commemorated?
  - What harms have been caused because your voice has been ignored, like poor health caused by pollution from nearby coal plants or industrial farms? What are the barriers to solving these issues?
  - What kind of relationship do you have with elected officials in your area? Are you able to meet with them?
  - Use data on income, education, housing, etc. to compare your neighborhood to ones nearby.

Example: “A few years ago, my neighbors and I started complaining about the lack of affordable healthy food. We found that there were ten liquor stores, and the closest grocery store was almost two miles away. Like Green Heights, our neighborhood of Hamilton South is working hard to bring a food market in. The neighborhood to the north has two grocery stores...”

## CLOSING

- Thank the members of the redistricting body (city council, school board, commission, committee, etc.)
- Provide them with written testimony and exhibits.
- Restate your goals, acknowledge your community members and partners in attendance, and thank the members.

Example: “I believe my neighborhood should be kept together for the many reasons our coalition members have outlined. I want to thank the commissioners for their consideration of keeping my neighborhood together.”

## Questions to Include in Public Comments to MICRC

Provide testimony that reminds the MICRC of their responsibilities and adherence to the Voting Rights Act.

- Briefly describe your community/city racial history and importance of the Voting Rights Act.
- Restate all of the MICRC principles & guidelines for drawing districts, and maintaining a transparent process.
- Review the MICRC website and construct your public comment from stated principles and guidelines.

Example: "My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I've been a resident of [neighborhood, place] for \_\_\_\_\_ years. I'm here with a group representing the \_\_\_\_\_ Branch of the MI NAACP. I would like the [Commission, Committee, etc.] to adhere to the Voting Rights Act by ensuring that minority voting strength will not be unreasonably compromised, and all efforts to avoid partisan gerrymandering will be applied. I would also like to address prison gerrymandering and request the MICRC to consider areas with significant prison population, and the inflated minority voting strength of such areas with persons that neither benefit from funding or increased representation in these areas.

**[PROVIDE ADDITIONAL DETAIL & QUESTIONS]**