

FLORIDA REDISTRICTING REPORT CARD

1.) All map drafting must be visible to the public in real time

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How to improve: Computer screens used to draft maps should be viewable online and available to any interested person in real time at every stage of the process from computer setup to completion and passage of maps. In addition, there should be a 24/7 audio-video feed in the room(s) where map drawing computers reside so that any conversation in the room is recorded and streamed in real time. Both the drafting and the feed should be recorded in a way that it can be played back. This would create real transparency.

2.) Communications must be preserved and made available as public records.

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How to improve: Currently, legislative rules and statutes expressly exempt redistricting documents and draft maps from open records laws and preservation of records policies. These exemptions must be repealed. Senate Bill 530 and House Bill 6053 will repeal the exemptions and help the redistricting process to become transparent. Hopefully this would restore public trust that was lost in the last redistricting cycle. Although Committee leaders have recommended members to preserve all documents and communications they should stop urging and make it mandatory by supporting this bill.

3.) All mapping data must be made available to the public in usable format.

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How to improve: Leaders of the redistricting and reapportionment committees have claimed that the public will be drawing maps with the same data as legislators. However, without the ability to download the data the public cannot confirm what data they are actually using. Nor can they use the data to evaluate or draw maps in their tool of choice.

Any and all data, including but not limited to census, political and demographic data, used by the Legislature to draw maps must be made available to the public in a format that the public can download and use for drawing or assessing alternative maps. (For example, if election results are used to assess political performance in drawing districts, that data should be made publicly accessible in a way for members of the public to understand what is in the dataset they are using.) The fact that certain data might be in the tool is not enough. The data should be accessible and understandable to anyone who wants to examine it.

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4.) Public comment and input must be solicited and accepted before and after maps are finalized by the Legislature.

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How to improve: Public input and comments (written and spoken) should be solicited and accepted **both before maps are drawn and after they are finalized**, but before a final vote is taken. The Legislature has taken the position that the public comment feature on its website satisfies this concern. However, public comment made by dropping a note or even a map into a website is worth nothing unless it is genuinely considered by decision makers. It has been made clear in committee meetings that there is no plan for public comment via the redistricting website to be even reviewed, much less taken into consideration by legislators (The update to the redistricting website public input form might have improved this grade, but comment without consideration serves little or no purpose). We have suggested that the legislature maintain a public comment log which legislators and staff can refer to. So far, there has been no response to our suggestion.

Another important method of obtaining public input would be the holding of public hearings. We recognize, and the Committee Chairs have confirmed that there will be no "redistricting road show" this year as there have been in previous cycles. But there is no valid reason why the committees cannot take virtual public input during committee meetings. It is important for legislators engaged in this work to listen to and understand the concerns of their constituents. Our calls for such opportunities have been ignored.

To improve this grade, input and comments from the public should be preserved and made available as public records in a public input log including transcribed copies of hearings, committee meetings, and testimony. And the committees should at the least allow for virtual public input during committee meetings providing Floridians from all over the state with the opportunity to speak directly to them so that their voices can be heard.

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5.) Ample notice of all proceedings (virtual or in person) must be given and all proceedings must be accessible to all Floridians regardless of language, economic status or disability.

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How to improve: In addition to public hearings described above, citizens should have the opportunity to appear and testify at committee meetings regardless of where they live, their ability to travel to Tallahassee, and what language they speak. Presently to testify at a committee meeting a Floridian has to be able to be in person in Tallahassee. The Committees should make such appearances available by zoom or other such technology. Language accessibility should also be prioritized, and closed captioning provided as needed. Translation services should be offered. Any non-public meetings relating to redistricting should be recorded and the recordings should be made available to the public. Provisions should be made for participation by persons who do not have ready access to computers.

Lastly, a timeline for when the public should expect to see draft maps and when they should expect to have the ability to participate in the process should be announced so members of the public can take advantage of any opportunity for providing input.