

From: Torres, Sen. Nikki

Sent: Thursday, October 12, 2023 2:03 PM

To: @SDC Members; @SRC Members; @HRC Members; @HDC Members

Subject: A Request Regarding Redistricting

Dear Colleagues,

I am writing to ask for a personal and professional courtesy.

As you know, a federal judge has ruled that the map of Legislative District 15, as created by our state's bipartisan Redistricting Commission, violates the federal Voting Rights Act. The judge has ordered the boundaries of the district, which I represent, to be redrawn – even though the commission approved them unanimously. At least one other district will also be affected by this.

The process used to redraw the maps is not just some political or legislative matter to me; it is very important to me personally. Please allow me to explain.

I'm a first-generation American Latina.

My dad has 15 siblings and was born in Michoacán, Mexico. My mom has 11 siblings and was born in Jalisco, Mexico. My parents met in California. They both came as immigrants and worked in the hospitality industry. After my brother was born, they decided to move to Washington because they heard there were more jobs here.

Members of my family have resided in Pasco ever since, for more than 40 years.

I grew up in East Pasco, working in agriculture alongside my parents from a very young age. We worked long hours picking fruit: cherries, apples, plums, grapes, you name it. While I didn't necessarily enjoy waking up around 4 a.m. every day, my family needed money, and as with most in our community, nothing mattered more than family and meeting the family's needs.

Today I am the mother of two adult daughters. I became a mother in 1992, as a single 16-year-old. As you might imagine, my parents were not pleased to see me pregnant at such a young age.

My mom had a sixth-grade education and my father had to help with family work at a very, very young age – so regularly attending school wasn't an option. Despite not having much formal education, my parents were very smart, and like most migrant families, they wanted more for their children. They wanted me to get an education and make the most of the American Dream.

My parents pushed me to be my best, and led by example. In the evenings they studied for their citizenship tests, taking some ESL classes. At age 8 I was their translator, and enjoyed helping them learn to speak English. They finally became proud United States citizens thanks to President Reagan's amnesty program.

Knowing my parents worked so hard to provide a better life for me and my siblings, I would not allow my being a young single mom to hold me back. After having my first daughter in January 1992, I continued attending school. It was very tough. I was paying rent, paying childcare and attending high school all at the same time.

At the beginning of my senior year, I met with my assigned school counselor and mentioned that two of my friends were talking about enrolling in a youth GED program. To my dismay, my counselor said I would not make it and should just drop out.

Well, like most Latinas, I tend to do the opposite of what I'm told, especially when people underestimate me. I met with a lady who was running the program in Pasco, .

I was enrolled and received my GED in 1994 — right when I was supposed to graduate with my friends.

I didn't stop there. I attended Columbia Basin College and became the first in my family to earn a college degree. In 2015, I received my MBA.

After becoming involved in the Tri-Cities Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, a mentor with the organization convinced me to step up and become president.

That same mentor and friend later convinced me to run for city council. Then others started talking to me about running for state Senate. I did and was elected.

What does all this have to do with redistricting?

Well, some of the partisan advocates who sought to invalidate the 15th District boundaries have insinuated (and sometimes stated bluntly) that I don't represent my district. Some have even proposed changing the boundaries to exclude me from my district.

This is hurtful and wrong.

When the district map was approved nearly two years ago, 73% of my district was Hispanic. That proportion is even higher now.

Like my family, many of the people I serve either have or have a family member who has toiled in the fields to keep everyone fed, clothed and sheltered.

Like me, many in my district did not come from a family with a long history of formal education. But they do have a strong work ethic and a strong desire to have their kids achieve the American Dream.

Many of my constituents in the Yakima Valley and the Tri-Cities have had many generations of their families live in this great country. But there also are many,

especially in cities like Grandview and Sunnyside, who are brand new to our country. Whether Spanish or English is their first language, I am able to reach out to learn what they need most from their government.

For some who can only speak Spanish, I am not just their voice, but I represent a government that for the first time can hear them and truly understand them.

So unlike what some would claim, I work extremely hard to represent all of the people of the 15th District with excellence.

Why? Because I am not just from this community, I am of this community. Their story is my story. Their struggles are my struggles. Our shared faith, love of family and hard work means my achievements are their achievements, and vice versa.

Whether it means getting up at 4 a.m. to pick fruit in the fields or working through the challenges of earning a diploma as a single mom, I know what it is like to put my head down and get the job done.

I believe the best way to redraw the districts in the Yakima Valley is to listen to the people of the state *and* the people of the Yakima Valley.

The people of our state wanted an end to back-room political deals that allow for gerrymandering. They changed our constitution so redistricting is done by a bipartisan commission that works in public view. For decades, that process has worked. The people also gave the state Legislature the ability to reconvene the Redistricting Commission when modifications must be made to boundaries. That is their preference, and we should listen.

Only by reconvening the bipartisan Redistricting Commission can we also ensure the voices of people and communities in the Yakima Valley will be heard. The opinions of partisan advocates from Southern California or Washington, D.C. may be important to some. I will trust the people who live in Yakima, Granger, Sunnyside and Grandview to know best about what their communities want.

A court-directed process shuts out the people most affected by the redistricting. Maps submitted by plaintiffs are woefully inadequate compared to listening to the people. A court-appointed special master would make maps behind closed doors. This is the opposite of public engagement and government transparency. It eliminates the bipartisan give-and-take that has for decades promoted equitable district boundaries.

So I come to you, as a representative of the people and communities I care so much about, to personally ask that we keep politics from interfering with the constitutional process the people have chosen. It is the right thing to do.

Please vote YES to meeting in a special session so we may convene the Redistricting Commission to do the work entrusted to it by the people.

Your friend and colleague,

Senator Nikki Torres

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Counties: Yakima, Franklin, Adams, Grant, Benton

Committees: Ways & Means; Local Government, Land Use, & Tribal Affairs; Law & Justice.