



GIVING EFFECTIVE PUBLIC TESTIMONY FOR REDISTRICTING

Redistricting advocacy is about three things:

1. Improving **transparency** in the process (See “Winning Open Public Redistricting Hearings”);
2. providing effective **testimony** in support of fair maps; and
3. establishing a clear **record** of community demands so that we can challenge any attempts to rig the process.

Testimony best practices:

You’ll know you have crafted effective testimony when you:

- ✓ **Establish yourself and your community.** Effective testimony establishes who you are and the community you are representing that day — it can be a clear statement of your lived experience and a demand for the resources you and your community need.
- ✓ **Identify a critical point.** Identify your topic or purpose and the point of your statement.
- ✓ **Tell a story.** Tell a story that engages the audience —in this case, a state legislative committee or local county commission or town council or school board.
- ✓ **Provide evidence and a list of consequences.** Include facts or evidence to support your point that are succinctly provided.
- ✓ **Specify an “ask.”** End with exactly what you want redistricting leaders to do.

Preparing your testimony:

- ✓ **Introduce yourself,** your organization and any coalitions you work with
- ✓ **Be clear on goals,** letting the audience know exactly why you’re there
- ✓ **Tell your story,** including how your community is impacted

- ✓ **Ask for a specific solution,** including how your community is helped
- ✓ **Use your notes,** if necessary to capture all of your points

Keep in mind that you may only have two minutes or less to speak. Choosing only the most **compelling data points** and **concise storytelling** not only keep audiences engaged but also paints a clear picture of what you’re here to do (and what map-makers should do too) in the time allotted.

Defining your community

Part of your testimony is defining your community. Ask: *What makes your neighborhood unique? What are the reasons they should keep your specific communities together? Are there geographic boundaries that help paint a picture?*

- ✓ **Define the unique qualities of your community.**
- ✓ **Highlight the geographic and structural boundaries in your neighborhood.**
- ✓ **Share and explain any “communities of interest” (COI) mapping.** (See “Redistricting in North Carolina” for more on “Communities of Interest.”)

Choosing only the **most compelling data points** and **concise storytelling** not only keeps audiences engaged but also paints a clear picture of what you’re here to do.

Creating your story:

Remember the “3 cs” when creating your story.

- ✔ **Culture:** How would you describe the **people** who are part of your community? What do they have in common? What is your history? What are your languages? What does your community value?
- ✔ **Concerns:** What **issues** need attention from your government? What community projects need resources? Are there past examples of elected officials ignoring our concerns?

- ✔ **Count:** Is there **data** we can present that can strengthen your arguments? A sample map — hand-drawn or drawn by a computer? Think about:
 - Number of people and income levels
 - Percentage of people of color or those who speak the same language
 - Distance from hospitals, grocery stores, or other essential services
 - Lack of playgrounds, parks, streetlights, clear roads, clean water

Example: “Hello committee, my name is TONYA SMITH. I’ve been a resident of HOPEVILLE for the last 25 years. I’m here with a group of my neighbors and the HOPE STREET neighborhood coalition. I would like to urge this committee to keep my community together when considering HOPEVILLE’S town maps.”

The HOPE STREET community is the oldest predominantly Black neighborhood in HOPEVILLE, home to nearly 500 of the town’s 3,000 residents. Many of the HOPE STREET residents attend the same church; our children go to the same school district; many work in the same nearby factory on its North end; and we share many of the same family names and have for generations. My father and grandfather lived in the same neighborhood, and like many of my neighbors, I live in the home my grandfather built with his own hands. HOPE STREET is surrounded on its east side by railroad tracks that flow through HOPEVILLE, and on its east side by the HOPEVILLE RIVER.

In 2011, HOPE STREET was redistricted by the town council and our tight-knit community was cracked into three districts in order to erode the political power of this historic Black community. In the process, we went from having the first-ever Black town council person — a person who understood our needs and was responsive to our calls — to a White elected, who, like the other members of the council, failed to take our calls or provide the resources we need to keep roads repaired, street lights working, and our community park usable.

We fear that without a newly-restored district that keeps our community of interest whole, the town council will continue to ignore our concerns. Worse, we are concerned that the school board may follow the lead of the town council and model their own maps on the ones that have carved our neighborhood and would mean our kids would join their parents in a divided district.

We have drawn maps that more closely reflect the pre-2011 changes and would ask that you consider them when redistricting HOPEVILLE and keep our community whole.

As was true in prior meetings when we shared these maps, we are happy to take your questions.

Thank you for your consideration.



Questions? Contact communications@scsj.org
919-323-3380
southerncoalition.org