



Lowell-Based Organizations Partner To Engage Communities Of Color In City's New Districting Process

8 Districts To Be Created In Advance Of 2021 Local Elections

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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LOWELL, MA – A partnership of community-based organizations in Lowell, MA announced plans to engage communities of color in the districting process that is getting underway in the City. The City is changing to an electoral system for City Council and School Committee that will include districts, following the settlement of a federal Voting Rights Act case that alleged that the City's former electoral system illegally diluted the vote of the City's communities of color. District lines will be drawn over the next several months by an independent expert selected jointly by the City and the Plaintiffs.

Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association (CMAA), Latinx Community Center for Empowerment (LCCE), and Lowell Alliance, together with **Lawyers for Civil Rights**, unveiled a multi-part plan to engage Lowell's diverse communities in the districting process in the weeks ahead. Through multi-lingual written materials, videos, and digital content (#LowellLines), the groups plan to communicate to residents about the districting process and gather input from community members about where district lines should be drawn.

"The change to a district-based system is an exciting opportunity for Lowell's communities of color and will help diversify our City Council and School Committee," said **Sovanna Pouy, Executive Director of CMAA**. "We want to make sure that our communities know about this change and have a chance to weigh in about exactly how district lines should be drawn."

"Each district will elect its own City Council member starting in November 2021," added **Diego Leonardo, President and Co-Founder of LCCE**. "It's critically important that Lowell's residents have a say in how those districts will be configured." Mr. Leonardo gave the example

of whether traditional neighborhoods such as the Acre will be kept intact or split into two or more districts.

“Having neighborhood representatives will give our communities a greater voice in City government,” said **Nancy Coan, Director of Lowell Alliance**. “But we need to make sure that the district lines are drawn in a way that makes sense for Lowell, and in particular for the City’s communities of color.”

Under the terms of the federal consent decree, each of the 8 districts will elect one City Council member. Two of the eight districts will be “majority-minority,” meaning that more than 50% of the citizen voting-age population in those districts will be Asian-American and Latinx combined. An additional three seats on the Council will be elected “at large” (city-wide). The districting process will also create 4 School Committee districts, one of which must be majority-minority. An additional two seats on the School Committee will be elected at large, and the Mayor will serve as the seventh School Committee member. The City and the Plaintiffs will jointly select the independent expert who will draw the district lines.

“Lowell’s new electoral system will help ensure compliance with the Voting Rights Act and will provide communities of color with equal voting opportunity,” said **Oren Sellstrom, Litigation Director at Lawyers for Civil Rights**, one of the attorneys who brought the federal lawsuit. In addition to LCR, the Plaintiffs are represented by the law firm of Ropes & Gray on a *pro bono* basis.

Sellstrom noted that a team of researchers at Tisch College of Tufts University has created an interactive mapping tool especially for Lowell’s districting process. The groups announcing today’s partnership say they hope residents will make use of the Tufts mapping tool (www.districtr.org) to start learning about the different ways that Lowell’s districts can be configured. Virtual public education sessions and tutorial videos on the mapping tool are planned for later this summer.

The coalition of community groups expressed their gratitude to the Theodore Edson Parker Foundation for supporting this critical community education initiative. A dedicated website for the initiative has been created at www.lawyersforcivilrights.org/LowellLines, which will be updated with new materials throughout the districting process.

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