

Communication from Public

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Council File No: 22-1197

Comments for Public Posting: On behalf of Abundant Housing LA, please see the attached letter supporting the motion to create an Ad Hoc Committee on Governance Reform.



10/27/2022

The Honorable Nithya Raman
Los Angeles City Council
200 N. Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Support – Ad Hoc Committee on Governance Reform – Council File 22-1197

Dear Councilmember Raman,

We write on behalf of Abundant Housing LA in support of your [motion](#) to create an Ad Hoc Committee on Governance Reform, in [Council File 22-1197](#). The motion calls on the City Council to convene this new committee to work out the details of implementing governance reform measures such as expanding the number of Council Districts, removing Councilmembers' direct discretionary power over land use decisions in their districts, reforming regulations on lobbyists and creating a truly independent redistricting commission.

Abundant Housing LA is a pro-housing, nonprofit advocacy organization working to help solve Southern California's housing crisis. We support reforms to legalize more homes, make homes easier to build, increase funding for affordable housing, and protect tenants, which are all needed to make housing more affordable, improve access to jobs and transit, promote greater environmental sustainability, and advance racial and economic equity. As a community organization, in order to maintain our independence, we do not accept financial support from housing developers or their consultants.

This motion was introduced in the context of the [racist tape scandal](#), in which former Councilmember Nury Martinez, Councilmembers Kevin de León and Gil Cedillo and former LA County Federation of Labor President Ron Herrera are heard making and condoning racist and disrespectful statements about colleagues and various groups as part of an effort to shape the redistricting process to their advantage. Angelenos are rightfully saddened and disgusted by the content of this conversation and we repeat our past calls for Councilmembers De León and Cedillo to resign to make way for new leadership that will be better positioned to advance the interests of all of Los Angeles' diverse communities. The motion also notes that three sitting City Councilmembers have faced federal indictments in recent years. Resignations alone are not enough. Los Angeles must also pursue systemic solutions to problems that have brought city government to this point of crisis.

Expanding the number of Council Districts would be a positive step. The decision to create 15 Council districts [dates to 1925](#), when the City's population was less than one fourth of what it is today. Each of Los Angeles' 15 Councilmembers represents about 257,000 people. This means

that each Councilmember represents a district larger than the entire City of Glendale, which has about 200,000 people and four councilmembers. Such large districts make it difficult to run an effective campaign without large sums of money. This in turn, empowers special interest groups who can bankroll campaigns and turn out volunteers.

Reforming the City's regulations on lobbying is an important component of governance reform. The people of Los Angeles have a right to know about the activities of those who are paid to influence public matters. While the First Amendment rights of people to have a voice in their government must always be respected, more transparency regarding paid lobbying is in the public interest. The City Ethics Commission released a series of recommendations in a May 2022 report (see [Council File 22-0560](#)) which provide a useful starting point for a policy discussion about how to ensure that paid lobbying is transparent and does not drown out the voices of everyday citizens.

Removing Councilmembers' direct discretionary authority over land use decisions in their districts is an important reform that speaks to the need for both ethical government and making it easier to build housing to address our housing shortage and the resulting affordability crisis. Discretionary review is review based on subjective standards. It makes project reviews more uncertain, time consuming and expensive and also triggers environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act for climate-friendly infill housing, all of which exacerbates our housing crisis. Discretionary review can also open the door to outright corruption. For example, per the Los Angeles Times: "[former Councilmember] Jose Huizar — who has pleaded not guilty to racketeering, bribery and other charges — is accused of orchestrating a pay-to-play scheme by agreeing to accept \$1.5 million in bribes from real estate developers who sought his favorable votes.¹" While all defendants are presumed innocent unless proven guilty, the allegations of corruption in the Huizar case, and their direct connection to discretionary land use decisions, are certainly cause for concern from a governance reform perspective. The alternative to discretionary review is ministerial review, which means review based on objective standards that are determined in advance of an application being submitted. Los Angeles should embrace ministerial review and work with the labor movement to balance the need for a better project review process with ensuring appropriate standards are in place for construction workers.

The current scandal sheds light on the brokenness of our redistricting process and the conflict of interest that occurs when politicians are empowered to choose their voters. Los Angeles' redistricting commission serves only in an advisory capacity. This must change. Los Angeles needs a truly independent redistricting commission that is empowered to determine the final maps in a manner that is fair, objective, does not seek to dilute the voting power of any particular ethnic group and is consistent with the law. [Many other jurisdictions](#) have independent

¹ Solis, Nathan (10/12/2022). "Jose Huizar's brother to testify in federal corruption trial of former L.A. councilman after pleading guilty." Los Angeles Times.

redistricting commissions, including the State of California, Los Angeles County and the City of Long Beach. Los Angeles should learn from these precedents and fashion its own independent redistricting commission according to the best practices observed. This should be done in conjunction with Council expansion, so that Angelenos can reap the benefits of a legitimate redistricting process before the next Census.

For these reasons, we are proud to support the motion, and we offer our thanks to you for bringing this important proposal forward.

Sincerely,

Leonora Camner

Leonora Camner
Executive Director
Abundant Housing LA

David J. Barboza

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