



KNOXVILLE BRANCH NAACP (#5596)
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The mission of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People is to ensure the political, educational, social, and economic equality of rights of all persons and to eliminate race-based discrimination.

October 4, 2021

Mr. Kyle Ward, Chair
Knox County Redistricting Committee
400 West Main Street
Knoxville, TN 37902

Subject: Proposed Redistricting Plans

Dear Commissioner Ward,

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson aimed to overcome legal barriers at the state and local levels that prevented African Americans from exercising their right to vote, as guaranteed under the 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The Voting Rights Act is considered one of the most far-reaching pieces of civil rights legislation in U.S. history; being credited with the election of 9,000 African-Americans, 5,000 Latinos, and numerous Native Americans to local, state, and national offices.

Due in large part to the Voting Rights Act, Knox County has historically had four political offices across various levels of local and state government that are represented by people of color: County Commission District 1, School Board District 1, City Council District 6, and State House District 15. While it is true District 1 County Commission is slightly underpopulated, there are ways for this district to grow without pushing one of the least diverse precincts in the whole county into it.

We oppose any effort that would disproportionately dilute East Knoxville's collective voice, specifically the moving of precinct 24Q into District 1. **The addition of 24Q precinct to District 1 would damage the electoral integrity of the district's minority representation, more than the addition of any other adjacent precinct.** With a Black population of only 1%, moving 24Q into the First District would drastically change the makeup of District 1 and potentially create a violation of the Voting Rights Act.

Diluting Knox County's one majority-minority district, with a neighborhood composed of 97% white West Knoxville voters, will throw the political power of the district towards the west and further diminish the voice of Black voters in Knoxville.

We understand District 1 is underpopulated and must grow. There are, however, much more equitable ways for District 1 to grow than the addition of 24Q. For example, Precinct 41 (Norwood), with a minority population of 32%, could be moved into the District instead. Furthermore, there is no reason to move 24Q out of District 4. The makeup of District 4 fits well with 24Q both socially, racially, geographically, and economically. There are better options to consider that will ensure a more equitable representation of voters in the electorate.

Black Knox County residents deserve to be represented and Knox County residents, as a whole, benefit from diverse representation. African Americans represent over 8% of the population, and minorities as a whole make up over 18%, with the highest concentration living in District 1. Moving voters from the least diverse precinct, into the District with the highest minority population, intentionally minimizes, dilutes, and ultimately overpowers voting rights - at worst. At best, it infers a blatant disregard of those who have historically been marginalized and underrepresented, for the purposes of amplifying the voices of those who are already heavily represented. As justice is at the heart of our democracy, let us ensure justice manifests in our policies, practices, and politics.

Fighting Forward,

Rev. Sam Brown

Vice Mayor Gwen McKenzie

Rep. Sam McKenzie

Rev. Dr. Harold Middlebrook

Phyllis Nichols

Evetty Satterfield

Knoxville Alumnae Chapter, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated

Knoxville-Knox League of Women Voters



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