

March 2, 2020

Testimony on HB 818
Redistricting and Apportionment - Population Count - Citizenship Status
Rules and Executive Nominations

Position: Favorable

My name is Keshia Morris Desir, I am the Census and Mass Incarceration Project Manager at Common Cause, a nonpartisan, grassroots organization that has 22,635 activists and members in Maryland working to assure that we have a democracy that works for everyone.

Common Cause Maryland supports HB 818 which would explicitly write into law that all Maryland residents, regardless of citizenship, must be counted and included when redistricting Congressional, legislative and local maps.

Federal law dictates district maps must have about the same number of people. However, it is up to state leaders to say who gets counted in those boundaries. Currently, Maryland law does not explicitly state that local, legislative and congressional districts should be inclusive of all Maryland's residents. We believe that it should.

Although Maryland has historically used total population counts when redistricting, putting this provision into law says to Marylanders of all backgrounds that in our democracy, everyone should have a voice.

Until 6 months ago, voting was not an option for me. This means that the census and being included in electoral districts was the one of the only ways my voice counted as a Maryland resident. Because of a failed immigration system, my family struggled for nearly 20 years to gain United States citizenship.

This is the case for nearly half a million Maryland residents, who live, work, and pay taxes here-- but are not yet naturalized. Immigrants are an integral part of Maryland's diverse and thriving communities and make extensive contributions that benefit all.

Our country was founded on the principle of no taxation without representation. But if we don't use total population numbers when drawing districts, that means millions of people who pay all kinds of taxes can potentially not appear on the map when drawing legislative districts in our state. That means they will have no representation and therefore no voice.

As Common Cause's recent report, *Whitewashing Representation: How Using Citizenship Data to Gerrymander will Undermine our Democracy*, explains, who gets counted to determine representation is a crucial part in ensuring that communities get the resources they need. As you know, representation determines questions like how many firetrucks, road repair projects, and playgrounds each community receives. When members of a community aren't counted, everyone in that community loses out.

Excluding non-citizens and children from voting districts is part of a devious long term plan by extreme right-wing politicians to further divide our country and undermine the principles of representative democracy. As we approach the 2020 Census and 2021 redistricting cycle, it is going to take all of us to be engaged and on watch to stop partisan and special interest forces like ALEC who seek to divide us by rigging the rules to gerrymander themselves into power.

We urge a favorable report.