

Rep. Mary Murphy (03B) Chair  
House of Representatives Redistricting Committee  
343 State Office Building  
St. Paul, MN 55155  
Submitted by email to: Nancy.conley@house.mn

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Dear members of the House Redistricting Committee,

I would like to thank the committee for holding these listening sessions for the citizens of Minnesota to share their thoughts on Redistricting and how the drawing of maps will affect their communities. My testimony is based upon my personal experiences, readings and observations. I am a sixty-nine year old Black American woman, born in Birmingham, Alabama during Jim Crow. I am a descendant of enslaved people and their enslavers. Black men in my family were coal miners and the women were domestic servants. My family members proudly served in the military during many wars including WWI, Vietnam war, and the Korean war. I have spent the last 59 years in suburban Minnesota where people are not always so nice.

I am submitting testimony on my own behalf; however, I believe my testimony applies to thousands of Black Americans who are descendants of enslaved Africans and free European enslavers. My genealogy research indicates that my European ancestors, fought in the revolutionary war, engaged in the buying, selling and breeding of African people kidnapped from numerous African countries. The need for cheap labor to clear land, grow and harvest crops, build cities, roads, and railroads during the expansion of America, allowed White European Americans to institute a race based system of slavery in perpetuity that continues to influence many aspects of our society today.

The Census Bureau combines data for Black Americans, descendants of the enslaved and their enslavers with African immigrants, many of whom have proudly become U.S. citizens. I believe the blending of these populations dilutes the Black American population data and makes it difficult to determine whether issues unique to Black Americans are being addressed. Although we hail from the same continent, we have no common cultural experiences and Black Americans are frequently looked down upon and shunned by the new arrivals.

Although the two populations are counted together, they are distinctly different and in many instances are treated differently by institutions and service providers. New immigrants arrive to American shores by choice with their cultures, religions, beliefs and communities intact. No one forces them to discard the memories of their families, homelands, languages, customs, or beliefs, as a condition of immigration. To be clear, I am not anti-immigrant; I know that the immigrant population makes great contributions to our society, and we all benefit. One example of this is how the healthcare system in Minnesota changed because of the influence of the cultures and beliefs of immigrant communities. When my husband was hospitalized with pancreatic cancer in 2014, I was allowed to stay in his room with him during his illness. Before immigrants arrived, visiting hours ended at 8:00 pm and all visitors were forced to leave the hospital. I thank immigrants for changing our healthcare system so we can be with our loved ones when they need us most.

I celebrate the fact that new immigrants were not treated like American Indian children who were forcefully removed from their tribes in an effort to brutally assimilate them into European American culture. My heart feels nothing but joy that they did not go through the seasoning process that my ancestors experienced. My African ancestors were violently and brutally stripped of their connection to their families, tribal affiliations, homelands, languages, cultures, religions, customs and belief systems. They were forced to adopt the language, culture, religions, customs and belief systems of their enslavers. They were not allowed to gather in cultural groups, could not read, or live as free individuals. Children, mothers and fathers were brutally ripped apart and sold as chattel during slavery, destroying families. In the 1950s and 1960s Black communities like Rondo in St. Paul, MN, were systematically destroyed across the nation to construct the national highway system. These systemic attacks on the Black community have damaged Black American families, and they continue to have an impact on Black health, wealth and education today.

The ancestors of Black Americans were created to serve American expansion, and their progeny continue to bear that burden today. Black Americans are more likely to be low wage earners and front line workers. According to SHRM, "On average, Black men in the U.S. earn 87 cents for every dollar earned by White men..." The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics show that Blackwomen are overrepresented in low-wage jobs and underrepresented in high-wage jobs. Black women in low-wage jobs earn more than fourteen thousand dollars less than their White counterparts. The difference in salary leads to an inability to live in safe affordable housing and secure reliable child care. The home ownership rate for Black Americans is less than fifty percent and growth has been stagnant for decades. The income, health and education disparities gap between White and Black Americans are closing at a slower rate than they are in other diverse communities. More action must be taken to close the income gap through increased wages, and home ownership. Social and economic programs like the G.I. Bill were not equally distributed to Black Americans and it impacted generational wealth in the Black community. This scarcity model of wealth distribution stems from a historical bias and viewing Black Americans through an invisibility lens. We must do more to identify, track and improve the conditions that effect economic wealth in the Black community.

Through brutality formerly unknown to humanity, my White European ancestors, beat, maimed, burned out and killed my Black ancestors for minor infractions. This history of violence is one that I wish had not been passed on. However, violence permeates our society, and it needs to be addressed as a systemic problem within our social, racial and justice systems. My Black ancestors were forced to serve their enslavers through a lens of invisibility. They were expected to clear land, tend crops, mine, bear children from savage rape, care for their enslaver's white children, cook their food and care for their homes without being seen or heard, they were to be invisible. This invisibility and dehumanization of Black Americans and women in particular continues to be an issue in our society today.

The expectation of Black invisibility is deeply ingrained in our society and if not adhered to it becomes an affront to the belief system of many White Americans. The results can be seen in the over policing of Black Americans and the incarceration of Black people. America has the highest incarceration rates in the world, and while Black Americans make up only 13 percent of the U.S. population, they represent 38 percent of arrests. A 2018 Sentencing Project Report to the United Nations stated, "Black Americans are more likely than White Americans to be arrested; once arrested, they are more likely to be convicted; and once convicted they are more likely to experience lengthy prison sentences." Action must be taken

to eliminate racial profiling, unwarranted stops and arrests in diverse communities. We must take action to hold police accountable for unlawful attacks and killing of Black Americans and other diverse people.

When I worked in Healthcare, my organization commissioned a community study that showed vast disparities between Whites and American Indian and Black Americans. However, the chronic illnesses in these communities were viewed as too great to address because they were rooted in systemic social issues such as racism and poverty. Therefore, these communities were set aside in favor of populations where progress could be shown, newly arrived immigrant populations. This approach to closing the health care disparities gap did nothing to address the health disparities of American Indians and Black Americans. Our chronic health problems are invisible within the healthcare community because they are deemed to be rooted in the systemic social issues that few healthcare systems are willing to tackle. Black American women are dying from pregnancy related complications at a rate of three to four times higher than non-Hispanic White women. The death rate of Black infants is twice that of non-Hispanic White women, this has been going on for years and little is being done to address the problem. My God, this is America! These are appalling statistics for a developed nation, and it needs to be addressed if we expect to improve the health of Black American women and children.

As a Black woman, I would like to feel confident that my healthcare provider is listening to my concerns and treating my illness based upon my condition and not my race. Due to implicit bias among healthcare providers Black Americans do not receive the same level of care as other populations. If I go to the emergency room, my health concerns are automatically treated as an excuse to get drugs. If I have pain, my pain level is rated lower than my White counterparts. All Black Americans are not drug addicts looking for drugs! I want to be treated with respect and have my medical care performed at the same level as my White counterparts. The medical community routinely dehumanizes Black women, and this behavior is unwarranted and must be stopped.

Another example of the health and wealth disparity gap miss was demonstrated during the distribution of the COVID-19 vaccines. Shortly after they started immunization the CDC indicated that non-White and predominately Black seniors were not getting vaccinated at the same rate. For some reason, they failed to grasp that few Black Americans can afford senior housing where vaccines were being distributed. These facilities are generally used by those with wealth or families who can augment the cost for these facilities. Most Black Americans seniors continue to live in their own homes or with relatives. Few had access to the funding to live in senior housing where those first vaccines were administered.

Our educational system treats Black American children as if they are invisible, preventing them from accessing support for low performing students. Because Black Americans are spread out in the general population, their progress is less likely to be tracked making it difficult for them to access assistance programs designed to close the education gap. For example, in school district 834, there is a program that works with the Hispanic, Asian and Muslim communities. When I asked if Black American children were in the program, I was told they are too difficult to find in the general population. Because Black Americans are not part of a collective culture community, Black children may not be receiving educational support at the same rate as collective culture communities. This appears to be another system that is failing to address the education disparity of Black Americans and their children.

Recently several Black women ran for office in Washington County. However, none were elected to state or city offices. Because Black Americans are disbursed throughout the general population, I am afraid that we cannot elect Black candidates to office in Washington County. Our vote is so diluted that

it appears as if we have no political power to force change to address the disparities outlined in my testimony. I have a great relationship with my state legislators; however, my interest do not always reflect the interest of the greater community. Where my community at large may want to address transportation, with a primary interest of keeping people who look like me out, my interests lie in stronger laws around police accountability. Nothing is more terrorizing than a police officer new to the community following you in a car designed for warfare. My fear is if I am stopped, will I walk away from the traffic stop alive or be killed for no reason. My larger community members have no fear of the police; however, I do. Now that the fervor around George Floyd's death has diminished, both lawmakers and the general population have lost their appetite to do more about police accountability. However, I will not feel safe in my community until police accountability has been addressed by this legislature.

In Summary:

Thank you for listening to my concerns about my community. My purpose in submitting this testimony is to draw attention to issues that Black American's face as a result of their history in this country. Their/my concerns are not being addressed under the current system of government and the healthcare and educational systems supported by our legislature. I ask you to remember what I have expressed here and take it into consideration as you draw maps and as you conduct the business of the state and its citizens in the future.

1. Black Americans, particularly Black women face issues that are more complex than our White counterparts. Black American women are confronted by both gender and racial issues and this places an undue burden on their ability to function in our society.
2. More must be done to eliminate racial profiling, unwarranted stops, arrest and high incarceration rates. More legislation must be enacted to hold police accountable for their actions and interactions with the Black community when they violate the law. I know that all police officers are not bad, this will remove the bad ones from the force and allow the good ones to do their jobs better.
3. The legislature must demand that service providers look deeper when exploring health, education and wealth disparities. The health and educational systems are not addressing long-term systemic issues that affect Black Americans. Although redlining was outlawed, Black Americans frequently cannot afford to live in safe communities with affordable housing. Many live in urban communities that are food deserts which contributes to lower health outcomes. If they move to the suburbs to find affordable housing, they often become part of racially biased communities where they are unwanted. Racism of this nature is stressful and can be debilitating. Black American issues and concerns are not the same as the larger population in which they live, and their voices are literally drowned out.
4. As Black Americans are forced to move to suburban areas, they cannot elect candidates who share a common understanding and interest of the issues impacting their lives. Nor are there candidates who are willing to address these issues on behalf of their Black American constituents. (i.e., policing, healthcare, education and wealth disparities) We need more political power so we can elect representatives who will better serve our interests.
5. I believe the violence that exist in this country is rooted in our brutal history and must stop. People need to feel safe in their communities regardless of where they live. Something must be done about guns on the streets and gang violence. I believe every effort should be made to institute community

policing. Both the police and citizens should be safe in the communities where they live, work and play.

Thank you for everything you do to make Minnesota a better place to live for all residents,

Sincerely,

Vivian Latimer Tanniehill

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