

DF 160-412-3

JAN 15 1972

Mr. Ernest L. Salaticch  
Assistant City Attorney  
Department of Law  
Room 2023  
City of New Orleans  
City Hall  
New Orleans, Louisiana 70112

Dear Mr. Salaticch:

This is in reference to your submission to the Attorney General pursuant to Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 of City Council Ordinance 4796 H.C.S. which reapportioned the councilmanic districts of the City of New Orleans. This submission was received by this Department on November 15, 1971.

We have given careful consideration to the submitted changes and the supporting information as well as data compiled by the Bureau of the Census and information and comments from interested parties. Our analysis shows that the district boundary lines in the submitted plan are drawn in a manner which appears to dilute black voting strength by combining a number of black voters with a larger number of white voters in each of the five districts. Moreover, it does not appear that the district lines are drawn as they are because of any compelling governmental need and

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they do not reflect numeric population configurations or considerations of district compactness or regularity of shape. Under these circumstances we cannot conclude, as we must under the Voting Rights Act, that this plan of reapportionment for the New Orleans Council will not have a racially discriminatory effect on voting. Consequently, on behalf of the Attorney General I must interpose an objection.

We have reached this conclusion reluctantly because we fully understand the complexities facing the city in designing a reapportionment plan to satisfy the needs of the city and its citizens and, simultaneously, to comply with the mandates of the federal Constitution and laws. We are persuaded, however, that the Voting Rights Act compels this result.

Of course, Section 5 permits you to seek a declaratory judgment from the District Court for the District of Columbia that this plan neither has the purpose nor will have the effect of denying or abridging the right to vote on account of race. Until such a judgment is rendered by that Court, however, the legal effect of the objection of the Attorney General is to render unenforceable this reapportionment plan.

In this connection, I wish to bring to your attention our receipt on January 12, 1973, of your City Council Ordinance 5026 M.C.S. which calls for a referendum election on March 20, 1973, on the question of increasing the size of the City Council from seven to nine members. We will review that submission and let you know the Attorney General's determination as soon as possible. However, I also wish to point out that should the increase in the size of the council be approved at the referendum, any districting plan drawn up as a result must also meet the clearance requirements of Section 5.

Sincerely,

DAVID L. NORMAN  
Assistant Attorney General  
Civil Rights Division