

February 10, 2022

Brenda Priestly Jackson, Chair
Rules Committee
Jacksonville City Council
117 West Duval Street, Suite 430
Jacksonville, FL 32202



Copies to: Council Members
School Board Members
Barbara Ireland Hobson, Legislative Assistant, Rules Committee
Jason Teal, General Counsel
Paige Johnston, Chief, Legislative Affairs Department



Re: Report on Racially Polarized Voting in Jacksonville Elections by Dr. Hannah Walker

Members of the Rules Committee of the Jacksonville City Council,

We are the leaders of four Jacksonville-based civic and racial justice organizations:

Harriet Tubman
Freedom Fighters

- The Northside Coalition of Jacksonville is a diverse group from all walks of life with the common focus of improving social, racial, and economic injustice. Our mission is to empower, educate and organize our communities in an effort to establish greater self-sufficiency.
- The ACLU Northeast Florida Chapter's mission is to defend the civil liberties and freedoms of Duval, Baker, Clay, Nassau and St. Johns County residents through education, outreach, and advocacy.
- Harriet Tubman Freedom Fighters is a nonpartisan organization established to ensure that all voters are heard. Our mission is to improve civic engagement in underserved communities.
- Founded in 1917, the Jacksonville NAACP's mission is to ensure the political, educational, social, and economic equality of rights of all persons and to eliminate race-based discrimination in the Jacksonville area.



After hearing concerns from Jacksonville residents, we engaged Dr. Hannah L. Walker, Assistant Professor of Government at the University of Texas at Austin, to ensure that the new City Council and School Board districts appropriately and lawfully represent all Jacksonville communities. We attach her report here. Dr. Walker's report examines 14 citywide elections held in Jacksonville between 2014 and 2020 to measure the level, if any, of racially polarized voting between Black and white voters in our elections.

Dr. Walker uses two methods of measurement: scatterplots with fitted lines and methods of ecological inference with 95 percent confidence bands. Dr. Walker concludes that those 14 elections "reveal[] a consistent pattern of

racially polarized voting” in Jacksonville. In those elections, Dr. Walker found that candidates preferred by Black voters disproportionately did not achieve electoral success citywide. Further, a majority of white voters in Jacksonville vote as a bloc against Black-preferred candidates. In every single election studied in the report, most Black voters supported one candidate, and most white voters supported the opposing candidate.



The existence of racially polarized voting in Jacksonville, given its history of discrimination against the Black community, means that the City must ensure that its Council districts comply with Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act, 52 U.S.C. § 10301. Of course, the City must also respect the federal Constitution’s prohibition on racial gerrymandering.



Dr. Walker’s report conducts a functional analysis of the level of Black Citizen Voting Age Population (BCVAP) that a district would need for it to usually allow Black voters the opportunity to elect candidates of their choice. Her report concludes that this number could be between 19 and 60 percent (depending on the election), with an average of **41 percent BCVAP**. Given these findings, we ask the Rules Committee and City Council to analyze and, as necessary, redraw the currently proposed neighborhood seat plan such that Black voters are properly and lawfully represented in the final plan. This will require a functional analysis using reconstituted elections of all proposed districts. We are happy to provide all the code and data that Dr. Walker used in her report to assist the Council with that analysis.

Harriet Tubman
Freedom Fighters



In the last two public hearings, many residents expressed concern about what appears to be the intentional and unnecessary packing of Black voters into proposed Council Districts 7, 8, 9, and 10; and School Board Districts 4 and 5. With the findings in the attached report, the Committee has an opportunity to listen to the people of Jacksonville and create districts that avoid this overconcentration of Black voters and the representational and legal problems that would follow. We hope the Committee answers the call of the people of Jacksonville and draws a district plan that will improve elections for all.

Sincerely,

Ben Frazier
President, Northside Coalition of Jacksonville

Michelle Charron Hollie
President, Northeast Florida Chapter of the ACLU

Rosemary McCoy
President, Harriet Tubman Freedom Fighters

Isaiah Rumlin
President, Jacksonville Branch of the NAACP