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Attorneys for Plaintiff

IN THE FIRST JUDICIAL DISTRICT COURT OF THE STATE OF NEVADA

IN AND FOR CARSON CITY

REV. LEONARD JACKSON,

Plaintiff,

V.

FAIR MAPS NEVADA PAC, and BARBARA CEGAVSKE, in her official capacity as Nevada Secretary of State,

Defendants.

Case No.: 1900 00209 13

Dept. No.:

OPENING BRIEF IN SUPPORT OF COMPLAINT FOR DECLARATORY AND INJUNCTIVE RELIEF

Plaintiff, Rev. Leonard Jackson, by and through counsel, Kevin Benson, Esq. of BENSON LAW, LLC, seeks declaratory and injunctive relief against Defendants that the Redistricting Commission Initiative Petition does not comply with the requirements of state law and therefore cannot appear on the general election ballot for 2020.

I. FACTS

On November 4, 2019, Sondra Cosgrove, in connection with Defendant Fair Maps Nevada PAC, filed a constitutional initiative petition designated as #C-02-2019 by the Secretary of State. The initiative petition seeks to amend the Nevada Constitution to require that redistricting be performed by a commission rather than by the Legislature ("the Petition"). The Petition proposes to add a new

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Section 5A to Article 4, Section 5 of the Nevada Constitution, which would be titled: "Apportionment; Creation of Independent Redistricting Commission." Petition, Section 5A.1

The Petition would create the "Independent Redistricting Commission" ("Commission") within the legislative branch of state government. Petition, Section 5A(1). Starting in the year 2023, the Commission would apportion the number of Senators and Assemblymen among the state legislative districts and would apportion the number of representatives to the United States House of Representatives among the congressional districts. Id.

The Commission would consist of seven members. Petition, Section 5A(2). The Senate Majority Leader, Senate Minority Leader, Speaker of the Assembly, and Assembly Minority Leader each appoint one commissioner. Id. These four commissioners appoint three additional commissioners, each of whom has not been registered or affiliated with either of the two largest political parties in the State within the last four years, and is not registered or affiliated with the same political party as another commissioner. Id.

Additionally, a commissioner cannot, within the four years preceding appointment and during their term on the Commission, be a registered lobbyist, a candidate for partisan office, an elected official to a partisan office, an officer or member of the governing body of a political party, a paid consultant or employee of a partisan elected official, candidate, PAC, or caucus, an employee of the Legislature or the State of Nevada (except employees of the judicial branch, the armed forces, or a state institution of higher education). Petition, Section 5A(3). Nor may a commissioner be related within the third degree of consanguinity or affinity to any such individual. Id.

All meetings of the Commission must be open to the public and the Commission shall ensure that the public has the opportunity to view, present testimony, and participate in the hearings before the Commission. All Commission materials shall be public records. Petition, Section 5A(5).

The Commission shall adopt a redistricting plan not later than July 1, 2023, and thereafter not later than 180 from the release of the decennial census. Petition, Section 5B(2).

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the citations to the text of the Petition are to the proposed constitutional section and subsection numbers in Section 2 of the Petition.

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A final plan requires five affirmative votes, including votes from at least one commissioner from each of the two largest political parties and one commissioner not registered or affiliated with either of those parties. Id.

The Commission must draw districts according to certain criteria, and must apply those criteria in the order listed in the Petition. Petition, Section 5B(1). These criteria include ensuring that, on a statewide basis, the districts "do not unduly advantage or disadvantage a political party." Id. The last criteria that the Commission may consider is the number of politically competitive districts. Id.

The Description of Effect of the Petition states in full:

This measure will amend the Nevada Constitution to establish an Independent Redistricting Commission to oversee the mapping of fair and competitive electoral districts for the Nevada Senate, Nevada Assembly, and U.S. House of Representatives.

The Commission will consist of seven Nevada voters, four who will be appointed by the leadership of the Nevada Legislature, and three who are unaffiliated with the two largest political parties who will be appointed by the other four commissioners. Commissioners may not be partisan candidates, lobbyists, or certain relatives of such individuals. All meetings of the Commission shall be open to the public who shall have opportunities to participate in hearings before the Commission.

The Commission will ensure, to the extent possible, that the electoral districts comply with the United States Constitution, have an approximately equal number of inhabitants, are geographically compact and contiguous, provide equal opportunities for racial and language minorities to participate in the political process, respect areas with recognized similarities of interests, including racial, ethnic, economic, social, cultural, geographic, or historic identities, do not unduly advantage or disadvantage a political party, and are politically competitive.

This amendment will require redistricting by the Commission beginning in 2023 and thereafter following each federal census.

Petition, p. 3, Description of Effect.

II. ARGUMENT

Legal Standard for the Description of Effect.

NRS 295.009(1)(b) requires that every initiative "[s]et forth, in not more than 200 words, a description of the effect of the initiative or referendum if the initiative or referendum is approved by the voters." The purpose of the description of effect is to "prevent voter confusion and promote informed decisions." Nevadans for Nev. v. Beers, 122 Nev. 930, 939, 142 P.3d 339, 345 (2006).

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The description of effect must appear on every signature page. NRS 295.009(1)(b). Thus "[t]he importance of the description of effect cannot be minimized, as it is what the voters see when deciding whether to even sign a petition." Coal. for Nev. 's Future v. RIP Commerce Tax, Inc., No. 69501, 2016 Nev. Unpub. LEXIS 153, at *5 (May 11, 2016) (unpublished decision - NRAP 36(c), citing Educ. Initiative PAC v. Comm. to Protect Nev. Jobs, 129 Nev. 35, 37, 293 P.3d 874, 876 (2013) and Las Vegas Taxpayer Accountability Comm. v. City Council, 125 Nev. 165, 177, 208 P.3d 429, 437 (2009)).

For that reason, the description of effect "must be a straightforward, succinct, and nonargumentative summary of what the initiative is designed to achieve." Educ. Initiative, 129 Nev. at 37, 293 P.3d at 876. The district court must also analyze "whether the information contained in the description is correct and does not misrepresent what the initiative will accomplish and how it intends to achieve those goals." Id., 129 Nev. at 35. 293 P.3d at 883.

B. The Description of Effect inaccurately states that the Commission would be "independent," and therefore is misleading.

The first sentence of the Petition's description of effect states in relevant part: "This measure will amend the Nevada Constitution to establish an Independent Redistricting Commission." (Emphasis added.) However, the Commission is not independent, thus that statement is inaccurate and seriously misleading. The Commission is not independent for two main reasons: its composition and its funding.

> The Commission is not independent because legislative leadership would directly appoint a majority of the commissioners.

First, a majority of the Commission is directly appointed by the major parties' legislative leadership. Petition, Section 5A(2). The Petition prohibits certain politically-active people from serving as commissioners. See Petition, Section 5A(3) (prohibiting from serving those who in the previous four years have been partisan candidates or elected officials, lobbyists, most state employees, paid political staff, etc., and their close relatives). These exclusions only prevent a certain sub-set of politically-involved people from serving on the Commission. For example, it does not prevent a legislator from appointing a campaign volunteer, nor does it prevent county commissioners

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or city council members from being appointed. The exclusions do not create independence because the appointments are still directly made by legislative leadership. Thus the exclusions do nothing to ensure that appointees are insulated from political pressures, are not beholden to the legislative leadership, and do not stand to gain personally or politically from serving on the Commission.

The composition and selection of the Commission as proposed in the Petition is contrary to truly "independent" redistricting commissions that have been adopted in other states. Four other states have given primary redistricting responsibility to independent commissions. In each of them, the independence of the commissioners is ensured by having a body other than the legislative leadership either appoint the commissioners directly, or create the pool from which commissioners are chosen.

In Arizona, the commission on appellate court appointments creates an initial pool of 25 nominees, ten from each of the two largest parties, and five not from those two parties. Ariz. Const. art. IV, pt. 2, § 1(4), (5). Legislative leadership can only appoint commissioners from this pool. Id. at (6).

In Colorado, a panel of three retired appellate court justices or judges randomly select nominees from all applicants who meet the minimum qualifications, then the panel creates pools for each of the two major parties and for nonpartisans. Colo. Const. Art. V, Section 44.1. Applicants are selected based on, among other things, their experience, analytical skills, and ability to remain impartial. Id. at 44.1(8)(1),(2). The panel of judges must ensure that the commission reflects Colorado's racial, ethnic, gender, and geographical diversity. Id. at 44.1(10). Legislative leadership can choose sub-pools from their respective party's pool, but ultimately the panel of retired judges make the final selection. *Id.* at 44.1(8)-(10).

In California, Proposition 11 of 2008 amended the California Constitution to create the Citizens Redistricting Commission. That amendment expressly states: "The selection process is designed to produce a commission that is independent from legislative influence and reasonably representative of this State's diversity." Cal. Const. Art. XXI, Section 2(c)(1). Government auditors create a pool from the qualified applicants. Cal. Govt. Code § 8252. Legislative leadership can reduce the pool, but then the auditors pick a majority of the commissioners by lottery, and those

commissioners appoint additional commissions from the remaining members of the pools, who form a minority of the commission. *Id.*

In Michigan, the secretary of state must make the application to serve as a commission widely available to the general public in all areas of the state. Mich. Const., Art. IV, § 6. The secretary of state must also mail 10,000 applications to randomly selected voters. *Id.* The secretary of state then creates the pools by randomly selecting from the qualified applicants, but shall also use accepted statistical methods to ensure that the pool represents the geographical and demographic diversity of the state. *Id.* Similar to California, legislative leadership can reduce the pools by striking a certain number of names, but the secretary of state, by lottery, makes the final selections of commissioners from the remaining pool. *Id.*

Additionally, most states prohibit commissioners from running for partisan office or being appointed to an office or government employment for a certain period of time *after* serving on the commission. *See e.g.*, Ariz. Const. art. IV, pt. 2, § 1(13) (ineligible for public office and cannot be a paid lobbyist for three years after serving); Cal. Const. Art. XXI, Section 2(c)(6) (ineligible for office for 5 to 10 years, depending on the office); Mich. Const. Art. IV § 6(1)(e). This reduces the incentive for commissioners to draw maps that would favor their own future political ambitions.

By contrast, the Petition in this case: (1) allows legislative leadership to directly appoint a majority of the Commission; (2) allows the commissioners to run for an office for which they just finished drawing new districts; and (3) allows the commissioners to be appointed to an office or any other government position immediately after completing redistricting. Thus the Petition permits substantial political influence over individual commissioners and the Commission itself. Nor does the Petition prevent individual commissioners from acting solely for their own political interests.

2. The Commission is not independent because it has no independent funding.

Redistricting is an expensive and difficult process. *See* "Reapportionment and Redistricting," Legislative Counsel Bureau Bulletin No. 11-04 (January 2011).² It requires a huge amount of data, staff with technical expertise, and specialized software. *Id.* Additionally, the Commission would

² Available at: https://www.leg.state.nv.us/Division/Research/Publications/InterimReports/2011/Bulletin11-04.pdf

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require administrative staff to manage its materials, schedule, notice, and hold its meetings, and respond to requests and input from the public. The Commission will also need legal guidance to ensure that it complies with the Voting Rights Act and other federal requirements, as well as the requirements in the Petition.

Despite these substantial costs, the Petition does not provide for any funding or funding mechanism for the Commission. In fact, the Petition does not require that the Commission be funded at all. Again, this contrasts starkly with truly independent commissions in other states.

For example, the Michigan Constitution mandates that the legislature shall fund the commission, and sets forth a formula for the amount. It states: "the legislature shall appropriate funds sufficient to compensate the commissioners and to enable the commission to carry out its functions, operations and activities, which activities include retaining independent, nonpartisan subject-matter experts and legal counsel, conducting hearings, publishing notices and maintaining a record of the commission's proceedings, and any other activity necessary for the commission to conduct its business, at an amount equal to not less than 25 percent of the general fund/general purpose budget for the secretary of state for that fiscal year." Mich. Const. Art. IV § 6(5) (emphasis added).

Other states have similar language, and also mandate that the legislature fund the commission adequately to ensure that it can carry out its duties.

California requires that the legislature appropriate funds for the commission according to a formula, but in no event less than \$3 million for each cycle of redistricting. Cal. Govt. Code. § 8253.6.

The Arizona Constitution similarly requires that the legislature fund the commission, and mandates that it be appropriated \$6 million for its first year of operation. Ariz. Const. Art. 4, Part 2, Section 1(18). The commission has express authority to challenge the sufficiency of the funding appropriated. Id.

The Legislature is the branch of government that holds the purse strings. State Emps. Ass'n v. Daines, 108 Nev. 15, 21, 824 P.2d 276, 279 (1992). As such, it has tremendous power to control the Commission by deciding whether, when, how much, and for what purposes to appropriate money for

the Commission. Likewise, it can direct the Legislative Counsel Bureau whether or not provide assistance to the Commission. *See* NRS 218F.110 (LCB staff hired and duties defined pursuant to budget approved by Legislative Commission).

In the context of the separation of powers doctrine, the Nevada Supreme Court has recognized that the judiciary cannot truly function as an independent branch of government if it is not able to require the disbursement of funds necessary to carrying out its basic duties. *State ex rel. Harvey v. Second Judicial Dist. Ct*, 117 Nev. 754, 770, 32 P.3d 1263, 1273 (2001). Similarly here, the Commission cannot operate independently of the Legislature if it has no independent control of the funding necessary to perform its duties. Indeed, the problem is exacerbated in this case because the Petition declares the Commission to be part of the legislative branch and to be executing legislative powers. Petition, Section 5A(7). That raises the question of whether it would itself be a violation of the separation of powers doctrine should a court attempt to order the Legislature to fund the Commission, or fund it in any particular way or amount. *Cf.* Ariz. Const. Art. 4, Part 2, Section 1(18) (expressly granting the commission standing in court and the power to challenge the adequacy of its funding).

 The Description of Effect is inaccurate and misleading because the Commission is not "independent."

"[A]n initiative petition signer must be informed at the time of signing of the nature and effect of that which is proposed. Failure to so inform the signatories and voters is deceptive and misleading..." Stumpf v. Lau, 108 Nev. 826, 833, 839 P.2d 120, 124 (1992) (internal quotations omitted).

The Petition's Description of Effect states that the Petition would establish an "independent" redistricting commission. The Description of Effect is invalid because it would mislead voters into believing that the Commission is independent from the political influence of the Legislature and other officials, when in fact it is not.

As discussed above, the Commission is not "independent" because a majority of the Commission is directly appointed at the sole discretion of the legislative leadership. Additionally, the Petition does not prevent Commissioners from running for or being appointed to an office

immediately after redistricting is complete. Finally, the Petition does not require that the Commission be funded. Consequently, the Legislature will be able to exercise substantial, if not total, control over the Commission by determining whom to appoint and how or whether to fund the Commission.

This case is closely analogous to Las Vegas Taxpayer Accountability v. City Council of Las Vegas, 125 Nev. 165, 183-84, 208 P.3d 429, 441 (2009). In that case, the description of effect stated that the petition would prevent the redevelopment agency from undertaking any additional redevelopment projects in a certain area. Id. However, the actual effect of the petition would be to stop all redevelopment projects, including those already underway. Id. The court held that the description of effect was inaccurate and materially misleading and it invalidated the petition. Id.

In this case, the Description of Effect states that the Commission will be "independent," but the text of the Petition itself shows that to be an inaccurate statement of the Petition's effect. Like in *Taxpayer Accountability*, that inaccuracy renders the Description of Effect materially misleading because the independence of the Commission is a critical factor for voters in determining whether to support to the Petition. Accordingly, this Petition therefore violates NRS 295.009(1)(b) and cannot be placed on the ballot.

C. The Description of Effect inaccurately states that the Commission will create "fair and competitive" districts.

The U.S. Supreme Court recently held, again, that partisan gerrymandering presents a non-justiciable political question. *Rucho v. Common Cause*, 139 S. Ct. 2484, 2506-07 (June 27, 2019). Accordingly, the federal laws and the U.S. Constitution do not provide voters with any relief from unfair partisan gerrymanders. The Petition's Description of Effect represents that it will end partisan gerrymandering in Nevada by creating "fair and competitive electoral districts." But this is a promise it cannot and will not keep. The Description of Effect is materially misleading because in fact the Petition requires neither fairness nor competitiveness.

The Petition sets forth various criteria that the Commission must use when creating districts. See Petition, 5B(1). The Petition states that the criteria must be followed in the order listed in the Petition. Id. Most of these criteria reflect the general federal requirements to comply with the Voting Rights Act and the one-person, one-vote doctrine. See id. In addition to these minimum requirements,

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the Petition states that the Commission should ensure that the districts "do not unduly advantage or disadvantage a political party." Id. By use of the term "unduly," it is clear that the Petition is designed and intended to tolerate unfairness between the political parties. The Petition sets forth no definitions or mechanism for determining when a party is "unduly" advantaged or disadvantaged. There will obviously be disagreement on that question, and the lack of any guidelines leaves every plan open to being challenged through litigation. The Petition also invites other types of unfairness, besides partisan bias. The Petition contains

no requirements that the Commissioners fairly represent Nevada's racial, language, ethnic, gender, geographic, or demographic diversity. All of the Commissioners could be white, male, wealthy residents of Las Vegas, for example. This would leave all other Nevadans without any formal representation in drawing districts that, among other things, are supposed to keep communities intact, while also ensuring that minorities retain their political voice.

Finally, partisan competitiveness is the very last of the criteria that the Commission is to consider when drawing districts. The Petition provides that the criteria must be applied in the order presented, so competitiveness will always be the last item considered. Petition, 5(B)(1). The Petition in fact expressly makes competitiveness subordinate to all other criteria. Id. And most importantly, the Petition does not even require that the Commission create competitive districts, and instead instructs it to "consider" competitiveness "to the extent practicable." Id.

In conclusion, the Description of Effect is inaccurate and materially misleading because it states that the Commission will create "fair and competitive electoral districts," but the Petition does not in fact require "fairness," nor does it require "competitive" districts. Voters will therefore be misled into believing that the Petition will prevent partisan gerrymandering and that the Commission will create truly fair and nonpartisan maps, when it actually need not do so.

D. The Description of Effect is Invalid Because it Fails to Inform Voters of the Cost of the Commission.

As described above, the Petition does not provide for funding or any funding source for the Commission. But in order to operate, the Commission necessarily needs funding. Redistricting is complex and expensive, requiring specialized software and often involving special experts to analyze

the data. See LCB Bulletin No. 11-04, supra at 6. As described above, other states expressly require the legislature to fund the commission, and typically set forth a formula intended to ensure that the funding is adequate. Several years ago, California set a baseline of \$3 million, while Arizona used a baseline of \$6 million.

However, the Description of Effect fails to describe any of these costs, nor does it notify voters of these costs. Furthermore, the Petition is likely to generate more litigation over the validity of the maps drawn by the Commission, because it states that no political party should be "unduly" advantaged or disadvantaged, but provides no guidelines, safe harbors, or other mechanism for the parties or the courts to evaluate when that criterion has been satisfied or when it has been violated. This type of litigation will further increase the costs of redistricting.

Additionally, the Description of Effect fails to inform voters that the Commission will "undo" whatever maps are drawn by the Legislature in 2021. The Description of Effect states that the Commission will begin drawing maps in 2023, but fails to describe the practical consequence: that the Legislature will have just drawn new districts 2021, which will only be operative for the 2022 election, and then the Commission will immediately start redrawing the maps. Thus the State will potentially spend twice the resources (or more) as it would normally on redistricting efforts in the three-year period following the 2020 census.

In Coal. for Nev.'s Future v. RIP Commerce Tax, Inc., No. 69501, 2016 Nev. Unpub. LEXIS 153, at *5 (May 11, 2016) (unpublished decision – NRAP 36(c)), the Nevada Supreme Court held that a referendum's description of effect was deceptive because it failed to inform voters of its practical consequences. The referendum's description of effect accurately summarized the legal effect it would have: it would repeal the commerce tax. Id. at *9-10. However, the description of effect contained no description of the practical consequences of repealing the commerce tax, which would be to unbalance the state budget for the biennium. Id. The court therefore held that the referendum's "description is deceptive for failing to accurately identify the practical ramification of the commerce tax's disapproval." Id.

It is not enough for a petition's description of effect to merely recite or summarize the petition's language. See id.; Prevent Sanctuary Cities v. Haley, 421 P.3d 281, No. 74966, 2018 Nev.

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Unpub. LEXIS 442, at *9-10 (May 16, 2018) (unpublished decision - NRAP 36(c)). The purpose of the description of effect is to inform the voters of the practical ramifications of the petition. Failure to do so renders the description of effect deceptive and misleading.

Like in RIP Commerce Tax and Prevent Sanctuary Cities, the Petition's Description of Effect simply repeats the language of the Petition without actually informing voters of the Petition's real consequences. These practical consequences include at potentialy doubling the cost of redistricting for the 2020 census, and failing to inform voters that the Commission will require substantial taxpayer funding to carry out its duties. Therefore, like the petitions in RIP Commerce Tax and Prevent Sanctuary Cities, the Petition must be declared invalid for failure to comply with NRS 295.009(1)(b).

III. CONCLUSION

For the reasons discussed above, Plaintiff respectfully requests that the Court enter an order:

- 1. Declaring that the Petition does not comply with NRS 295.009(1)(b) and is therefore invalid;
- 2. Prohibiting the Secretary of State from placing the Petition on any ballot; and,
- 3. Granting any other relief the Court deems just.

Dated this <u>26th</u> day of November, 2019.

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