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November 18, 2024

Via Electronic Mail
City Council of Healdsburg
401 Grove Street
Healdsburg, CA 95448

Re: District Elections

Dear Members of the Healdsburg City Council,

On behalf of the Latino Democratic Club of Sonoma County, we write in strong support of transitioning to district-based elections within the City of Healdsburg. This change is essential to ensure equitable representation for all residents, particularly Latino and BIPOC communities whose voices have been historically diluted under the current at-large election system.

Under at-large elections, the votes of minority communities are frequently overshadowed by majority voting blocs, which often results in city councils that fail to reflect the diversity of the community. Legal precedent under the California Voting Rights Act (CVRA), such as *Sanchez v. City of Modesto (2006)*, clearly illustrates how at-large election systems can disenfranchise minority groups. When cities like Santa Rosa transitioned to district-based elections, the results were striking. Diverse representation improved, with council members from varying ethnic, socioeconomic, and geographical backgrounds taking office.

This shift has brought critical benefits beyond increased diversity. District elections have empowered local representatives to address the unique needs of their communities, ensuring that underserved neighborhoods have advocates who are intimately familiar with their challenges. In municipalities with at-large elections, it's not uncommon for multiple council members to reside in the same neighborhood. This concentration of representation exacerbates inequities, as neighborhoods without direct representation often struggle to secure city services or funding for infrastructure and community projects. In Santa Rosa, it took years to achieve this change due to opposition from entrenched forces that sought to maintain the status quo and suppress the representation of marginalized populations. Once implemented, however, the results were undeniable: district elections allowed for representation that better reflected the community's diversity, giving voice to previously silenced communities.

By moving to district-based elections, Healdsburg can foster a council that better understands the nuances of each district, creating a more equitable allocation of resources and services. This system ensures that every resident has a voice, and each area of the city has someone dedicated to advocating for its specific needs. District representatives remain accountable to their constituents, but their work ultimately benefits the city by addressing systemic disparities in funding and access to services.

We strongly urge the City Council to adopt district-based elections, not just to comply with the CVRA but also to create a government that reflects the diversity and strength of Healdsburg's community. Such a change is vital to fostering trust, equity, and representation for all residents, regardless of ethnicity or geography.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Caroline Bañuelos

Caroline Bañuelos, President
Sonoma County Latino Democratic Club