



CITY OF LAGUNA NIGUEL

From the Office of the Mayor

A Special Mayor's Message

Regarding the City's Transition to District-Based Municipal Elections

For the past 34 years, Laguna Niguel residents have been able to vote for their elected City Council representatives using city-wide elections. These "at large" elections have resulted in a diverse group of City Council Members through the years who have worked together to make Laguna Niguel one of the safest cities in the nation, a financially strong city with zero debt and balanced budgets, a city with one of the highest qualities of life anywhere, and a diverse city that has used its diversity to set one of the highest bars anywhere for excellence in city government. That is reality. That's real life. And that is just who Laguna Niguel is now and has always been.

With that background, I am extremely disappointed Laguna Niguel is now being forced into district elections by a bad state law being exploited by plaintiffs lawyers outside our city. California's legislature created the so-called California "Voting Rights" Act to force cities to switch from at-large voting to district voting in the name of racial equality. Unfortunately, state law allows attorneys to do this but in this case it has nothing to do with racial equality. The statute also implies that cities may be forced to pay for the plaintiff's attorney's fees, which causes the cost of litigation to skyrocket even further. For context, no city has ever won litigation challenging this law and most that have tried have spent tens of millions of dollars only to lose.

Once a city is threatened with this lawsuit, the city has two options: 1) agree to move to districts, and the plaintiff attorney fee is capped at \$35,000; or 2) fight the lawsuit, likely spend tens of millions in legal fees, and be forced to switch to districts by a court. To date, not a single city has won this lawsuit.

Regrettably, Laguna Niguel has now been drawn into one of these fights where it is faced with spending millions of dollars to defend its current "at large" elections, or agree to move to "district" elections, not because it believes anything needs to be changed, but just to avoid litigation.

Your City Council is united in its disdain for this petty political gamesmanship. We made the decision to transition to district elections, however, to protect our City's finances, not because we believe anything needs to be changed, but just to avoid the cost of protracted litigation. As your Mayor, I am committed to ensuring your voice is heard throughout this process and encourage you to stay involved.

For more information, please visit www.cityoflagunaniguel.org/districting.

Sincerely,

Kelly Jennings

Mayor Kelly Jennings