



April 12, 2012

The Honourable Ronald C. Mills  
Chair, Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission for Saskatchewan  
440 2nd Avenue North, Suite 203  
Saskatoon, SK S7K 2C3

Dear Mr. Justice Mills:

On behalf of the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association (SUMA), I would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on federal electoral boundaries in Saskatchewan. SUMA represents the interests of 450 urban governments in Saskatchewan. Our members include cities, towns, villages, northern municipalities, and resort villages. Each member government has a locally elected council, and collectively our members represent 82 percent of the people of Saskatchewan.

Since the 2004 review of electoral boundaries, the landscape in this province has changed. Saskatchewan is becoming an urban province with more residents living in our cities, towns and villages. As the voice of urban Saskatchewan, SUMA wants to ensure our members are receiving fair and balanced representation in the House of Commons. Therefore, SUMA seeks change to the urban-rural mix ridings that exist in Regina and Saskatoon.

Saskatchewan's two largest cities comprise 40 percent of the province's total population and are both growing at record pace. The continued growth results from a strong provincial economy that attracts new industries and provides new opportunities. This population influx, which creates unique challenges for Saskatoon and Regina, is not experienced elsewhere in Saskatchewan.

As large urban centres with dense populations, both cities face numerous social issues unique to cities. These issues include access to affordable housing, homelessness, addressing an urban aboriginal population, meeting needs of new immigrants and complex policing matters involving organized crime and gangs. The cities are also concerned with mass transit, finding solutions to air pollution as a result of increased traffic and industry, funding of major infrastructure projects relating to multi-million dollar waste water and water treatment facilities, solid waste landfills, road networks and large scale recreational and cultural facilities. Although economic linkages exist between rural and urban populations, the interests of rural areas and smaller towns and villages are significantly different than large urban centres.

*"The Voice of Saskatchewan Cities, Towns and Villages"*



These varying interests are a challenge within the current structure. The eight ridings in Regina and Saskatoon that combine rural and urban populations are unique in Canada. Initially designed to achieve a high level of voter parity by reducing the difference in population density among electoral districts, these ridings have now grown in population such that the rural and urban parity within the riding is unbalanced. In fact, in most of these ridings the urban vote greatly outweighs the rural. This has created an environment where neither rural nor urban voters receive adequate representation.

SUMA is proposing the commission consider the creation of strictly urban ridings within the municipal boundaries of Saskatoon and Regina. This would be reflective of other jurisdictions in Canada where larger centres are represented as a distinct community of interest. This proposal acknowledges that the rural portion is a community of interest and should not be grouped with the larger urban centre. The concept of urban ridings was introduced by the 2004 Commission and based on the figures released in the 2011 federal census; its proposal for creating distinct urban ridings in Regina and Saskatoon is still relevant today.

The previous commission reported the concern that urban ridings would result in large rural ridings. SUMA has members in these rural ridings and we do not view this as a concern. The population shift in this province is to urban centres (towns and villages) thereby localizing the population, and with advancements in communication (online conferencing, e-mail and wireless networks) and increasing availability of information on line –access to a Member of Parliament is far greater now than ever before. In addition, any southern rural riding would never compare to the size of the northern riding where some of our members live in secluded communities with limited availability to internet, travel is usually limited to airplane only and access to government services is sparse.

For the commission to ensure boundaries are fair, in terms of equality, regional representation, and other factors that create a community of interest or identity, is necessary to give serious consideration to creating urban ridings within Regina and Saskatoon.

I look forward to reviewing the commission's proposal and hopefully SUMA's suggestions are reflected in the final report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Allan Earle". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Allan Earle  
President