

From: applications.administrator@capitol.local
To: [Senate Redistricting](#)
Subject: INETMAIL: Redistricting Public Input
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Date: 2021-09-19
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Affirm public info: I agree

Regarding: Congressional

Message:

Hello, my name is Ashley Cheng representing myself and the TX AAPI Redistricting Coalition. I would like to start by saying that the most important thing for this committee is to respect federal and state law, including the Voting Rights Act. None of my testimony should be used to justify diminishing the ability of any community of color to elect the candidate of their choice.

My Community of Interest is in NW Austin, including the Anderson Mill/Northwest Hills/Great Hills/Jollyville neighborhoods. NW Austin, including the neighborhoods mentioned above, are a Community of Interest because of shared cultural background, issues and common countries of origin, languages and dialects, economic status, media markets, community services and organizations, including language assistance services, stores, health clinics, as well as places of worship.

The majority of my friends and family in the Asian American community live in this area, many of whom have established their livelihoods through their small businesses here. My aunt's restaurant has been a part of the community in Anderson Mill for 18 years. My father's Chinese restaurant has been slinging egg rolls and lo mein at the same location on Mopac and Greystone drive for nearly 40 years. A friend runs the Asian American Cultural Center on Jollyville Road, offering elderly programming in Korean and Chinese, pre-school and after school and language programming for kids, as well as members activities, like karaoke, table tennis and Majong. So many things Asians love! They also run our city's annual Dragon Boat Festival. If you've never been a part of a festival, it's a spectacular sensory overload of gorgeous, colorfully adorned boats and delicious food. If you are in town next April, we welcome you! Being part of a Dragon Boat team teaches collaboration and perseverance. Traits we so desperately need in our leaders today. I, on the other hand, am so terrible at the sport I once disqualified my team by making us crash and literally behead a dragon of another boat.

We also have on Capitol of Texas Highway just north of 2222, the Buddhist temple, F6 Guang Shan Xiang Yún, where my mother goes to celebrate and pray every Lunar New Year to ensure her children and her granddaughter have prosperous and lucky years ahead.

And we are lucky. We're lucky to have such a robust and vibrant community here. But we still largely go unnoticed, invisible to the institutions that we have supported with

our votes and our tax dollars for decades.

Language access is a major issue in AAPI communities that often goes ignored because we don't currently have congressional or state legislative districts that allow us to advocate together and vote for the candidates of our choice. According to the nonpartisan nonprofit APIA Vote, 79% of Asian Americans in Texas speak a language other than English at home, and of those, more than 40% speak English less than "very well." After English and Spanish, the most common languages in Texas are Vietnamese, Mandarin, Hindi and Tagalog. These are members of our community whose voices matter. They are protected under the Voting Rights Act and need to be kept together, so they can have a chance to be heard.

Lack of language access has real world, sometimes life or death ramifications, that leaves our communities more isolated and under-resourced. The Austin American Statesman published an article March 14 after the winter storm with the headline "Austin's Asian communities faced added challenge during the Texas freeze." The story chronicled the dire consequences of language barriers and lack of translated information from government systems during times of crisis. So many of us carry the trauma of that storm with us and a desperation to still fix our power grid, but there are some in our community whose stories are dismissed or left untold.

That same mother who prays for me every Lunar New Year to keep us safe? We risked the icy roads to pick her up from her home; after two days without power, her thermostat was reading in the 40s and her internal body temperature had started to drop. After the storm had cleared though, she was met with a whole new bureaucratic storm of paperwork and the daunting struggle to receive assistance when English isn't your first language. And by the way, the only reason why our local paper even covered that story was because they had an Asian American on staff who wrote it. This is why representation matters.

This is why the responsibility you've been tasked with of mapping our future is so important, especially to communities of color and immigrants. The Asian American Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities now make up 6.6% of the Texas population, according to the 2020 census. That's a more than 66% increase since the last census. We are the fastest growing across Texas, and yet for too long have been unfairly divided into multiple legislative districts. Texas has never sent an AAPI member to the US Congress.

The community of interest that I have outlined is currently split into four congressional districts: 31, 17, 25, and, where I live, in 10, which stretches to Houston and saw one of the highest total population increases of any congressional district in the state. Just behind the growth TX-22, which is another high density AAPI and community of color area. Here in TX-10, that population increase was due to a 12% increase in White population compared to a 54% increase in Hispanic/Latinos, 44% increase in African Americans, 52% increase in Native Hawaiian Pacific Islanders, and 113% increase in Asians. We deserve an additional minority opportunity district here and in the Harris County and Fort Bend County areas where TX-10 extends toward. The Asian growth in Travis County was 70%, and the Asian growth in Williamson County was 167%. The new legislative district lines should reflect this substantial growth, and allow this community of interest to elect candidates of their choice.

I urge this committee to establish a fair and open process by continuing to host virtual committee hearings like these with enough public notice throughout the next special session, providing at least 14 days for the public to review the maps, providing at least 5 days to review any changes to proposed maps, keeping a record of all documents, written communications, emails, text messages and draft maps, and finally, providing an analysis of how the new maps impact historically disenfranchised communities of color.

Thank you so much Chair, Madame Vice Chair, and the rest of this committee for the opportunity to speak today.

