

From: applications.administrator@capitol.local
To: [Senate Redistricting](#)
Subject: INETMAIL: Redistricting Public Input
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Date: 2023-03-24
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Affirm public info: I agree

Regarding: Senate

Message:

January 28, 2023 I write concerning SB375, the legislation filed by Sen. Joan Huffman to ratify the Texas Senate district map that was passed in a special session of the legislature. I reiterate the comments I previously submitted in 2021 regarding the maps for Senate Districts 13, 17 and 18. I am a resident of Fort Bend County. I currently reside in Senate District 18, and I am represented by Sen. Lois Kolkhorst. I am Asian American, specifically Indian American. I live in a precinct (Fort Bend Precinct 3135) and a neighborhood (Telfair) that is predominantly Asian American. I am concerned that the Senate District maps do not adequately reflect the growth in the Asian American (including Pacific Islander) community and instead dilute the voting strength of Asian Americans by dividing our communities over the three Senate districts – SD13, SD17 and SD18. Census data showed that 85% of the growth in Fort Bend County's population 2010 and 2020 censuses was from people of color communities. Among that group Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) groups were the fastest growing - 2020 census data says that AAPI communities grew by 83% from the previous census. At least a third of all new residents in Fort Bend County since 2010 identify as AAPI and currently AAPI residents make up 23% of the County. While Ft. Bend County has a 23% Asian American voting age population, the voting age population of the senate districts which carve up Fort Bend County are 12% for SD13, 12.9% for SD 17, and 12.7% for SD 18. It is evident that predominantly Asian American neighborhoods and precincts that are near or adjacent to one another were split between the three districts when they could have been combined into one. For example, the current Fort Bend County Precinct 3102 in SD 18, which is 75%

Asian American, is adjacent to Precinct 3129 in SD 17, which is 61.6% Asian American, which is adjacent to Precinct 3044 in SD 13, which is 70% Asian American. In fact, it appears from the map that the proposed Senate District 17 carves a path right through Asian American communities in order to add more precincts with larger percentages of white people. Within the Asian American community, Fort Bend County is home to precincts with the highest concentrations of South Asian Americans in Texas (people of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Sri Lankan origin, among others). Although South Asian American communities are very diverse, our communities are also tied together in myriad ways by common immigration stories, appearance, language, religion, food, dress and even occupations. We proudly elected K. P. George, who is the first South Asian American County Judge in Texas. Fort Bend County Court-at-Law Judge Juli Mathew is the first Indian American woman to be elected judge in the United States. The current Fort Bend County Precinct 3 Constable, Nabil Shike, was the first South Asian and first Muslim Constable elected to office in Texas. Our collective voting strength as South Asians within Fort Bend enabled us to achieve these firsts. But in the proposed Senate District maps, the precincts in Fort Bend County with the highest concentrations of South Asians are split between the three Senate Districts – current Precinct 3147, 3135 in SD 18, Precinct 3129 in SD17 and Precincts 3065 and 3044 in SD 13. Rather than being grouped with largely non-Christian South Asian American communities nearby, we are tied to predominantly white Christian rural communities hundreds of miles away. So, while Senator Kolkhorst's regular references to the Bible and scripture in social media posts may be warmly received by many, the same posts make my community feel unseen and unwelcome. You will not find a single social media post by Sen. Kolkhorst to celebrate Ramadan or Diwali, for example, in spite of the fact that her district is home to some of the largest mosques and Hindu temples in the Houston metropolitan area. This year alone Senator Kolkhorst recently sponsored SB147 – a bill that has been viewed by many Asian Americans as anti-Asian. Her office's response to constituents has included that "her constituents" were concerned about foreign nationals purchasing land in the district. I wonder whether, when Senator Kolkhorst's office thinks of her constituents, she includes the tens of thousands of Asian Americans who live, work, pray, play and raise families within SD18, they home they chose. Many of the voting eligible Asian Americans have an immigration history which includes years, often decades, in the US on visas or as refugees, then permanent residency and then, finally, citizenship. Many of those people would not have been able to purchase their homes or business property when they did if SB147 was law a decade ago. Senator Kolkhorst's response to criticism from the Asian American community

of SB147 has been, at best, tone deaf. But her district is designed so that any amount of opposition the Asian American community exerts is meaningless to her. Ignoring us would have the same political consequence to her as paying attention. Perhaps, the composition of her district means putting us on the menu has a greater political benefit to her than pulling up seats at the table for our communities would. By diluting our voting strength, we are unable to select leaders who see and listen to us and who openly respect our religions or immigration stories. We need better, more responsive representation and more opportunity districts for our communities, including in coalition with other people of color and immigrant populations with similar values and needs. The data I've presented above regarding the growth in the Asian American population in Fort Bend should not be new to the Senate Redistricting Committee. I provided similar testimony before along with many other people. But it's like déjà vu all over again with the Senate failing to acknowledge the ways the Senate map cracked our communities and diluted our voting strength. As Ashley Cheng of Austin stated in the 2021 redistricting hearings, "so many of you are sitting here and telling me these were drawn race-blind, How could you say that, that our communities are still invisible to you after all of this?" Ashley Cheng's statement perfectly encapsulates our shared frustration. How could Joan Huffman, whose district includes Sugar Land, Texas with an Asian American population of 38.2% - the highest concentration of Asian Americans of any Texas city - say that the maps were drawn race-blind when she carved a path through the City of Sugar Land to create her own Senate District? The Senate Districts divide communities in other ways. The map divides the County, the City of Sugar Land (as mentioned) and Fort Bend ISD into multiple Senate Districts. For example, one of my daughters attends elementary school in Senate District 18 and my other daughter attends middle school in Senate District 13. The high school they are zoned to sits in Senate District 17. The proposed maps even divide Home Owners Association neighborhoods like Riverstone (which is divided between SD 13 and SD17). Finally, the Asian American community isn't the only community harmed by the maps. The census showed that 95% of all growth in Texas occurred in the African American, Latino, and Asian American communities. Any fair map must reflect the diversity of our state. The current maps did not create any new opportunity district based on these census numbers in metroplexes, like Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, and Austin. Instead, they pack and crack our communities and dilute our votes. I urge this committee to comply with the Voting Rights Act and respect the reality of the 2020 census by allowing people of color the opportunity to choose the candidates of their choice. I urge this committee to hold additional in-person and virtual hearings that allow public input

from the entire state and to create a new Senate map that reflects our community input and the census data. In addition, please continue to allow a fair and open process, keeping a record of all documents, written communications, emails, text messages and draft maps, and providing analysis of how the new maps impact historically disenfranchised communities of color. Thank you. Respectfully, Lakshmi Ramakrishnan

