The Honorable Ray Kennedy
Commissioner, California Citizens Redistricting Commission
721 Capitol Mall, Suite 260
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Commissioner Kennedy,

RE: The Morongo Basin and Greater Palm Springs a Community of Interest

As community leaders for the Morongo Basin, we submit this letter as a coalition seeking to highlight the connections between the greater Palm Springs region known as the Coachella Valley and the cities of Twenty-nine Palms, Yucca Valley and the unincorporated communities of Joshua Tree, Morongo Valley, and Landers of which we serve.

Most, if not all, of our coalition participated in the California Citizens Redistricting Commission (Commission) hearing on June 24 via public comment or by submitting testimony electronically. However, we also feel that it is important to communicate with you directly. As a resident of the Morongo Basin, we believe you are in a unique position to understand the important relationship between our two regions.

The comments offered by our coalition members during the June 24 Commission meeting focused on the concept of “community of interest.” For clarity, the state constitution states clearly, “A community of interest is a contiguous population which shares common social and economic interests that should be included within a single district for purposes of its effective and fair representation. Examples of such shared interests are those common to an urban area, a rural area, an industrial area, or an agricultural area, and those common to areas in which the people share similar living standards, use the same transportation facilities, have similar work opportunities, or have access to the same media of communication relevant to the election process.”

To that end, we would like to highlight several topics that are of great importance to members of our communities that should be considered as the Commission moves through the redistricting process. Specifically, we discuss transportation and economic ties, access to shared media relevant to election process, access to quality health care, higher education opportunities, and shared regional and federal land management.

Intertwined Transportation, Work Opportunities, and Economic Sectors:

Economic data shows that Morongo Basin residents are more likely to purchase goods and services from Coachella Valley businesses when they are unable to access them locally due to the proximity of the two regions. Relative to employment, a study commissioned by the Mountain/Desert Committee using Census Transportation Planning Package data for Yucca Valley alone showed
“Yucca Valley residents employed down the pass is attributable to the City's close proximity to the SR-62 Pass and the employment centers of Riverside and San Bernardino Counties, especially the Coachella Valley.” Furthermore, in a 2018 Demographic Profile of Yucca Valley by Dr. John Husing, average employment commuting time of 52 minutes is representative of the average commute time to much of the Coachella Valley’s desert communities, including Palm Springs, Cathedral City, Rancho Mirage and Palm Desert.

Accordingly, it is important that regional transportation planning be conducted in a collaborative manner to ensure efficient transportation routes. Moreover, the booming tourism economy in recent years is in part fueled by travelers who utilize the Palm Springs International Airport to access destination spots like the Coachella Music and Arts Festival and Joshua Tree National Park.

Access to Media Relevant to the Election Process:

A media market, broadcast market, media region, designated market area (DMA), television market area, or simply market is defined as a region where the population can receive the same (or similar) television and radio station offerings and may also include other types of media such as newspapers and internet content.

AC Nielson and Arbitron Radio Metro define the Palm Springs media markets for both television and radio. As defined by AC Nielson the Morongo Basin and the Coachella Valley receive local news through KESQ, KMIR, KPSP, and KCWQ. With no local television outlets in the Morongo Basin, the Town to Yucca Valley, the City of 29 Palms, and the surrounding unincorporated communities rely on Coachella Valley based television channels for election related and other news. According to Arbitron, the Morongo Basin and Coachella Valley receive local news and content by numerous radio stations transmitting locally.

Access To Healthcare:

Desert Regional Medical Center in Palm Springs, Hi-Desert Medical Center in Joshua Tree, and JFK Memorial Hospital located in Indio together makeup what is known as the Desert Care Network, operated by Tenet Healthcare.

These three hospitals, along with specialty centers, Eisenhower Medical Center, and one of the largest primary care networks in the Desert Area, encompasses a healthcare system that sets a standard of service that is dedicated to the health and well-being of the entire region. Healthcare services are provided in an integrated manner, where many specialty services required by residents in the Morongo Basin are attained in the Coachella Valley, namely, Palm Springs and Rancho Mirage.

Higher Education Opportunities:

Many of the communities within the Morongo Basin are considered disadvantaged communities and access to higher education is of paramount importance. Because there isn't a four-year university in the Morongo Basin, a significant number of students from the Morongo Basin choose to attend the satellite campuses University of California, Riverside and California State University, San Bernardino, Palm Desert Campus which are both located in the Coachella Valley.
Shared Regional and Federal Land Management:

With the growing popularity of Joshua Tree National Park, which lies in both San Bernardino and Riverside counties, it's important that federal land management agencies coordinate across county lines. As an example, personnel for the U.S. Bureau of Land Management based out of their Palm Springs office routinely provide mutual aid to the National Park Service, especially for incidents involving search and rescue operations.

As drought conditions increase concerns over regional water quality and supply, it's important to note that the boundary of the Colorado River Basin Regional Water Control Board includes both the Morongo Basin and the Coachella Valley. With the challenges of the Salton Sea and other air quality issues, it's also noteworthy that the Mojave Desert Air Quality Management District (MDAQMD) serves both regions. In fact, San Bernardino County Supervisor Dawn Rowe and Riverside County Supervisor Manny Perez are both members of the MDAQMD Governing Board.

For the reasons above, we seek to preserve the connection between the Morongo Basin and the Coachella Valley as a community of interest relative to the upcoming redistricting process. This established connection between the communities of the Morongo Basin and the Coachella Valley are an integral part of life for our residents, and it's the basis for many shared commonalities. Moreover, we hope that your unique and unrivaled understanding of the connection between our regions will be tremendously valuable to the process before the Commission.

We thank you for your attention to this. Should you have any further questions, we look forward to the opportunity to engage further.

Respectfully,

Merl R. Abel
Mayor,
Yucca Valley

Dawn Rowe
Supervisor,
San Bernardino County

Daniel L. Mintz, Sr.,
Mayor,
City of Twentynine Palms