August 24, 2021

Commissioners
California Citizens Redistricting Commission
c/o California State Auditor
621 Capitol Mall, Suite 1200
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Redistricting and the Antelope Valley

Dear Commissioners,

First and foremost, thank you for your service to our great state of California, especially during this time of the pandemic.

We write today regarding the significance of your constitutional obligation pursuant to the California Constitution to prioritize, first and foremost, that districts comply with the United States Constitution and the federal Voting Rights Act. As you know, Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act prohibits voting practices and procedures, including redistricting plans, that discriminate on the basis of race. It prohibits not only election-related practices and procedures that are intended to be racially discriminatory, but also those that are shown to have a racially discriminatory result. The equal protection clause in the 14th amendment of the United States Constitution also bans such discrimination.

The California Constitution requires that the geographic integrity of a local community of interest “shall be respected in a manner that minimizes their division to the extent possible[.]” Cal. Const. Art. XXI, Sec. 2 (d)(4). 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.” Ibid.
For reasons detailed in this letter, the Antelope Valley should not share any districts, at the state or federal levels, with the cities of Simi Valley or Hesperia. According to the United States Census Bureau, Simi Valley is majority White and 1.3% Black. Hesperia is approximately 4% Black.

Meanwhile, Lancaster is 21% Black and 38% Latino. In the past thirty years, the Black population of Lancaster has tripled. Similarly, Palmdale has an overwhelmingly non-White population – it is 20% White, 14.8% Black, with a majority Latino population.

The significance of these statistics is that for the past several decades, racial discrimination, overpolicing, hyper surveillance and violence have plagued Black and brown communities in Lancaster and Palmdale. As a result, the Antelope Valley shares a very strong common social interest in eradicating racial injustice.

Simi Valley does not share this common interest. Simi Valley delivered the acquittals for the officers who mercilessly tortured Rodney King. Recently in Simi Valley, one City Councilmember who has served on the council for more than ten years shared a meme related to the Black Lives Matter protests in the summer of 2020. The meme included the text, “Wanna stop the riots? Mobilize the septic tank trucks, put a pressure cannon on em… hose em down… the end.” He commented, “This is brilliant, it will also enforce the mask rule!!” He continues to represent one-fifth of Simi Valley and is supported by his community.

To make matters worse for Black and Brown communities facing discrimination in the Antelope Valley, our community is inexplicably further disempowered by Congressional District 23. Congressional District 23 largely covers Kern County and Tulare County but, for some reason, is awkwardly drawn to include a significant portion of Lancaster in Los Angeles County. This section of Lancaster is predominantly African-American. Congressional District 23 further dilutes the voting power of Black voters in the Antelope Valley by way of “cracking” - a tactic used to drown out a community’s voice by arbitrarily dividing the community into separate districts.

Because the Antelope Valley has been forced into the same districts as cities that do not share its interests, and because the Antelope Valley is currently “cracked” by Congressional Districts 21
and 23, the voices of countless Black and brown communities in the Antelope Valley have been drowned out from both Congress and our State Legislature. The Antelope Valley’s ability to have its voice fully and fairly heard in Congress and in our State Legislature is long overdue. It is within your power to give us our voices in our political system.

Racial Discrimination and Violence in the Antelope Valley

Both racial discrimination and violence have plagued the Antelope Valley for decades. While this history cannot be sufficiently encapsulated in a single letter, an overview of the various ways in which these phenomena have manifested are summarized herein.

1. Racial Discrimination and Violence from the Lancaster and Palmdale Sheriffs’ Departments

In 2011, the United States Department of Justice (“DOJ”), Civil Rights Division initiated a “pattern and practice” investigation into the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department’s (“LASD”) Palmdale and Lancaster Stations in response to community complaints about racial discrimination and violence from the sheriffs. In 2013, the DOJ found that LASD’s Lancaster and Palmdale stations engaged in a pattern or practice of stops, searches, and seizures and excessive force in violation of the Constitution and federal law. In addition, the DOJ found a pattern or practice of discrimination against African Americans in LASD’s enforcement of Section 8 Housing in violation of the Fair Housing Act.

More specifically, the DOJ made the following findings:

- African Americans and Latinos were more likely to be stopped and/or searched than whites, even when controlling for factors other than race, such as crime rates;
- The widespread use of unlawful backseat detentions violating the Fourth Amendment;
- A pattern of unreasonable force disproportionately targeting people of color;
- A pattern of intimidation and harassment of African-American housing choice voucher holders by LASD deputies;
Inadequate implementation of accountability measures to intervene on unconstitutional conduct, which allowed all of these problems to occur.

The DOJ and LASD reached preliminary agreements to make sweeping changes to policing in the Antelope Valley and to the enforcement of the Housing Choice Voucher Program (Section 8 Housing). The settlement agreement is 58 pages with eight sections, all of which relate to abuse of power, poor treatment of Black and brown residents, and ensuring accountability so that the abuse does not continue.

As part of the settlement agreement, the DOJ required that monitors be appointed to oversee the implementation of the settlement agreement. Now, over five years after the agreement was ordered and approved by the Court, the monitors continue to report that this settlement agreement has not been fully implemented, out of compliance, and that the local sheriff’s deputies continue to racially discriminate against Black and brown residents. As recently as September 2020, the monitors reported the following:

Our findings indicate that Blacks are much more likely to be stopped, are more likely to be searched when stopped, are more likely to experience a backseat detention, and are more likely to be asked whether they are on probation or parole. Regarding the latter outcome, similar proportions of Whites, Hispanics, and Blacks asked about their community corrections status are indeed on probation or parole.

See An Analysis of Racial/Ethnic Disparities In Stops by Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Deputies in the Antelope Valley, dated September 2020, page 92.

More broadly, the monitors found that the LASD Palmdale and Lancaster stations are not complying with the settlement agreement. According to the monitors: “It has now been more than five years since the Parties signed that agreement, but the Department is still not in compliance with any of [its] core provisions. The responsibility for this ongoing failure rests solely with Department managers.” See Monitoring Team Second Complaint Audit Report, dated 12/15/20, page 106. The monitors added: “three years ago, we …. pointed out the need for a
protocol to guide investigations into allegations of racial profiling, but LASD has not even begun to correct that deficiency.” *Ibid.*

Below is a more detailed explanation of being out of compliance:

1. **Stops**
   a. LASD is out of compliance on **18 of 23** Settlement Agreement requirements related to Stops, including:
      i. Stops and detentions are based on reasonable suspicion
      ii. Backseat detentions require reasonable suspicion and reasonable safety concerns.
      iii. Deputies respond to complaints about backseat detentions
      iv. Deputies do not conduct arbitrary searches
      v. Supervisors and station commanders address all violations

2. **Use of Force (UOF)**
   a. LASD is out of compliance on **13 of 19** Settlement Agreement requirements related to UOF, including:
      i. De-escalation of force
      ii. Deputies held accountable for uses of force that violate policy or law
      iii. Management review of UOF investigations
   b. UOF protocols not updated or approved by DOJ after 5 years

3. **Complaints**
   a. LASD is out of compliance on **11 of 17** Settlement Agreement requirements related to Complaints, including:
      i. Public access to complaint forms
      ii. Witnesses interviewed separately; interviews documented
      iii. Every allegation of misconduct investigated, even if not specifically articulated by complainant
      iv. Impeding the filing of a complaint grounds for discipline

In the Antelope Valley, law enforcement’s discriminatory treatment of Black and brown residents remains systemic and far too widespread. This is an extremely important issue for communities of color in the Antelope Valley. Just this past May 2021, *there was an incident where the police*
racially profiled a young Black man where they had his knee in his back and a gun to his head while his head was placed on the hot ground. Many Black and brown residents live in fear – fear from other racist residents of the Antelope Valley and fear from law enforcement. After decades of racial discrimination and violence brought upon Black and brown communities, we are seeking racial justice through our political system. Unfortunately, sharing our districts with Simi Valley and Hesperia continues to drown out our demands for racial equality from state and federal politics.

2. Racial Discrimination and Violence from Other Residents of the Antelope Valley Community

As of 2010, the Antelope Valley had the highest rate of hate crimes of any region in Los Angeles County. This story goes back to the 1960s, when African-American families who wanted to live in Lancaster and Palmdale were redirected to the neighboring community of Sun Village because of discriminatory real estate practices. In the 1980s, demographics in the Antelope Valley began to shift as lower real estate prices attracted African-American and Latino families from other parts of Los Angeles County. From 1990 to 2010, the proportion of Whites in Lancaster decreased from 79% of the population to 49.6% of the population. During that time, the proportion of African Americans nearly tripled, increasing from 7.4% of the population to 20.5% of the population. Meanwhile, the Latino population more than doubled from 15% to 38% of the population.

Coinciding with these dramatic changes in demographics has been the momentous rise of hate crimes in the Antelope Valley. Due to the sheer volume of hate crimes, this letter can only provide a few examples: In 1997, three white youths murdered a black man in Palmdale so that one of the youths could earn a white supremacist tattoo. In August 2010, a predominantly African-American church in Palmdale was fire-bombed. As the Department of Justice noted in its 2013 letter to the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department, numerous non-Black residents of the Antelope Valley have made social-media references to their neighborhoods “growing darker,” also referring to “the creeping darkness.” In 2010, an LA Deputy Sheriff took photographs of luxury vehicles in a home’s garage during a Section 8 compliance check and sent them to the administrator of an “I hate Section 8” Facebook page. Subsequently, the family’s home was vandalized with the message, “I hate Section 8 you fucking niggers,” scrawled on the garage
door, and the family’s son had urine thrown on him as the perpetrator yelled, “Dirty Section 8 nigger.” The family relocated from Palmdale back to Los Angeles for fear of further harassment. Any person of color in the Antelope Valley can tell you that these are not isolated incidents. Rather, this is life for people of color in the Antelope Valley.

Hostilities towards the Black and Brown communities in the Antelope Valley are extreme and call for significant legislative changes to ensure that these communities are protected and represented. However, the current makeup of our local districts prevents these communities from having their voices heard, leaving these communities constructively voiceless in our political system.

3. **Racial Discrimination in Our Local Schools**

The Antelope Valley Union High School District has an 87% non-White student body. At a special meeting in April 2019, multiple school board trustees voted to launch a wide-ranging, independent investigation into alleged discrimination in the district’s hiring practices and the suspension and expulsion of non-White students. This year, April 2021, the AVUHSD held a “special meeting” to vote on the temporary contract between the school district and the LASD, with less than 24 hours notice to the public. That Special Meeting, while legal, exploited Governor’s Newsom’s Executive Order N-29-20, which relaxed the usual Brown Act requirements due to COVID. This kind of process undermines our common democratic principles and sets a terrible example for the Valley’s school children. Our school districts are perpetuating the school to prison pipeline. Here are some quick facts relating to AVUHSD:

- Black students made up 16.7% of the student population in AVUHSD during the 2018-2019 school year, yet they received over half of all law enforcement contacts reported under the Racial Identity and Profiling Act.\(^1\)
- Of referrals to law enforcement made by AVUHSD school staff and administration that same year, Black students received nearly 1/3 of all referrals, according to LASD data reported pursuant to the Racial Identity and Profiling Act.\(^2\)

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2. *Id.*
Black and Latinx students are searched by law enforcement in AVUHSD more than students in every other racial or ethnic group combined, according to LASD data reported pursuant to the Racial Identity and Profiling Act.  

Black students in AVUHSD received 107 referrals to school administrators for disciplinary action in 2018-2019 but only 6 referrals to counselors, according to LASD data reported pursuant to the Racial Identity and Profiling Act.  

Black students in AVUHSD represented 27% of the population of students with disabilities in 2018-2019, yet they received 44% of referrals to law enforcement.  

This is not just happening in our high schools but also in our elementarys and middle schools. Recent events have captured the pervasiveness of racism in our school system. In May 2019, four teachers and a principal were placed on leave after a photo of the educators posing with a noose circulated via email and social media. In March 2021, a Palmdale School District elementary school teacher went on a half-hour tirade laced with racism and profanity on Zoom, stating in reference to making excuses that, “This is what Black people do.”  

Again, Black and Brown residents of the Antelope Valley want racial justice. Forcing us to share districts with communities that do not share our struggles and interests amounts to “cracking,” or diluting our voting power and the volume of our voices. We want to live in our communities free from the threat of violence and discrimination in our schools, from our law enforcement, and from our neighbors. We need political representation in order to achieve that goal.  

**Conclusion**  

We wish to sincerely thank you for your service, for your time, and for your consideration. We, as community leaders in the Antelope Valley, ask that you give us the political, social and economic power that we have been waiting for since the last redistricting cycle. We must look through an intersectional lense concerning the Antelope Valley. Our voices must be included.  

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3 *Id.*  
4 *Id.*
It is our hope that in the current social climate, and in the midst of an unprecedented world-wide push for racial justice, truth, healing, unity and transformation, that our community finally gains full and fair representation in our political system.

We ask you for a voice.

Thank you.