

Written Testimony

Introduction:

Good afternoon, my name is Caroline Nguyen. I'm a Garden Grove resident and I'm here on behalf of the California Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative. Our organization works to improve the health, safety, and rights of the nail and beauty care workforce to achieve a more sustainable and just industry. We're also a member of the People's Redistricting Alliance, which is a coalition of 15 community-based organizations established to promote a greater community voice in statewide and local redistricting processes in Orange County.

My community is:

Our community of interest is nail salon workers, who have a deep historical connection and origin in Southern California. In the 1970's, a group of 20 Vietnamese women were trained on how to do manicures at a refugee camp. Afterwards, they became licensed and found jobs at salons across Southern California. As war continued to drive an influx of Southeast Asian immigrants and refugees into the United States, many sought financial security by taking on low-wage jobs, such as those in nail salons.

My community is located:

Today, a little under 70% of nail technicians in California are Vietnamese. As many of us know, Little Saigon in Orange County is home to the largest Vietnamese population in the U.S. This means that while nail salons themselves may be geographically dispersed across Orange County, a significant proportion of its workforce live in the cities that make up Little Saigon, most notably Westminster, West Garden Grove, and West Santa Ana.

What makes my community special is:

Nail salon workers experience chronic exposure to a host of chemicals and toxins that are known to be cancer-causing agents. For 6 days a week, 10 hours a day, they handle glues, polishes, acetone, and other products that cause symptoms like skin rashes and asthma, as well as more long-term health complications like miscarriages and infertility.

Beyond the environmental impacts, manicurists also experience wage theft and labor violations. Nail salon workers earn an average of 25k a year. They have often been misclassified as independent contractors instead of employees and are therefore denied critical protections such as sick time, workers' comp, and breaks. A recent example of how this can be a barrier is during California's first lockdown in March 2020, manicurists who were misclassified as 1099 workers instead of W2 employees were not eligible for unemployment insurance. It wasn't until a second relief package was introduced a few months later that they gained access to these benefits.

My community is similar to the following neighborhoods:

Because of these shared challenges, areas in which many Vietnamese nail salon workers live—Westminster and West Garden Grove—should be kept together. Santa Ana West of Harbor Blvd should be included in the same district as well, because this region is home to a sizable Vietnamese community that has historically been excluded from consideration in Santa Ana municipal governance and decision-making processes.

My community is different from the following neighborhoods:

East Garden Grove, however, has a large Latinx population and should not be grouped with the more heavily Vietnamese-populated West Garden Grove and Westminster. We support the creation of a federal Voting Rights Act district that keeps East Garden Grove—from West St to West Garden Grove Blvd to Newhope St—with neighboring areas like East Santa Ana that share similar racial demographics.

In conclusion:

The nail salon industry has tripled over the last 2 decades and now generates over 7 billion dollars in revenue annually. As the demand for nail services continues to rise, it is vital that we sustain the political presence and cohesion of a workforce that has been facing a long-overlooked epidemic of health, socioeconomic, and labor concerns.