

**Community of Interest Testimony
to the California Citizens Redistricting Commission**

Date: October 1, 2021

Zone: J (Orange County)

Area: Fullerton

Name: Susan Cheng

Organizational Affiliation: Ahri for Justice (People's Redistricting Alliance)

Community of Interest: Fullerton and Buena Park

Direction: Keep the Korean community in Buena Park (North East of the I-5 FWY) and North West Fullerton together and South of Chapman Ave (Fullerton).

Introduction

Hi, my name is Susan Cheng and I am writing on behalf of AHRI for Justice. Our organization serves low-income individuals and families, undocumented workers, young people, and survivors of domestic violence through our many programs such as civic engagement, youth organizing, and direct legal services. In addition we are a member of the People's Redistricting Alliance, a coalition of 16 community-based organizations established to promote a greater community voice in statewide and local redistricting processes here in Orange County.

Who my community is:

The communities of interest we serve in the city of Fullerton and Buena Park primarily consist of Asian American, Latinx, Pacific Islander, undocumented & immigrant communities, LGBTQ+ folks, and low-income communities of color. These communities are often siloed off into their own neighborhoods and remain separate from places in Fullerton and Buena Park that are rich in resources and have plenty of access to public assistance and services. Many of these communities face similar issues due to the lack of resources provided, such as lack of affordable housing due to gentrification and lack of rent control. And even lack of resources and support when cities were shut down due to Stay At Home orders back in March last year. Many of our base members came to us to ask for housing assistance, services, and mutual aid funds. Since the start of the pandemic, AHRI has been able to provide over 300 families and community members in the area with financial assistance and additional services.

Yet, these communities are the backbone of the city's abundant small businesses and cultural landscape. We are also seeing more and more young folks from the large student populations of Cal State Fullerton and Fullerton College being actively involved in Fullerton's civic life. These young and working-class Fullerton residents want nothing more than to have their fair share of resources so their communities can thrive. Many of the students we work with want to see Ethnic Studies implemented in K-12 schools. They want community gardens, affordable housing, and accessible mental health resources. And yet, resources are spent on creating more unaffordable housing, new parking structures, and businesses. It is constantly shown again and again that the needs of our underserved communities such as, AAPI, Latinx, immigrant and low income communities of color are not always addressed. Even when immigrant communities do want to get involved, there are obstacles often put in place such as language barriers, accessibility, time restraints, and many more that further distance folks from being able to use their voice.

My community is located:

Several of our communities live along Orangethorpe, Commonwealth, and neighborhoods near Fullerton College and CSUF. In these areas you'll see plenty of old small businesses, low-income multi-family homes, an abundance of fast food restaurants, and a growing number of community members struggling to find stable housing.

In Buena Park, our community members live North East of the I-5 freeway and share many similarities with our Fullerton community members.

My community is similar to the following neighborhoods:

Buena Park North East of the I-5 FWY and North West Fullerton are similar in that they share a big Korean American community. Many of the AAPI and Korean community members residing in these areas come to AHRI for in-language legal service needs. The communities there must be kept together for language access and access for undocumented AAPI community members/

Fullerton (South of Chapman Ave.) is similar to Buena Park in many ways. Many of the residents reside in apartment complexes with no rent control and are often prone to landlord intimidation and eviction, especially during this pandemic. These residents identify as POC - predominantly Latinx and AAPI- and work multiple jobs. Many of them lack representation and are looking for resources available to them.

My community is different from the following neighborhoods:

The city of Fullerton has a clear income-divide between North and South Fullerton, using Chapman Ave as the dividing line to reflect income level and the challenges around rent relief, food security, access to affordable health care, and resources for essential workers. The lack of rent control in POC majority communities in Fullerton are distinctly different from Central North and Northwest Fullerton.

What makes my community special is:

Elected officials do not represent the communities we serve. And haven't for decades. Language barriers make it difficult for community members to understand what is happening and there is a large lack of language access for our Korean and Spanish communities. There is a high emphasis on the business districts and sometimes takes priority over community voices (immigrant, working class, low-income). These issues became more apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic, when housing, health, mental, and financial resources were not available for our most vulnerable populations. These needs included:

1. Rent Relief / Eviction Protection for low-income and undocumented families
2. Food Security
3. Access to affordable mental health resources
4. Local unemployment resources for working class families who did not have access to financial aid because of labor impacts during the pandemic
5. Essential workers who could not resume their jobs / careers because of risk of illness with family members who have pre-existing conditions.

Elected representatives have not been representing our communities for a while now. It was made even clearer at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic when housing, health, mental, and financial resources were not offered. As a

result, AHRI had to create our own community assistance fund to provide financial aid and resources to under-resourced community members. Below are several testimonies:

- "I have tried searching for other relief funds and resources to provide some income for basic needs such as food, medications, and gas. My nephew is doing speech therapy so he needs to be taken to his therapist twice a week. Landlord still expects rent even if we can't get evicted; it will just accumulate if we don't put some money down. I am running out of options and without proper documentation, we can't even apply to essential job sites to work. It's taking a toll on my mental health for sure too, trying to support myself and my family of 6."
- "We weren't making enough to pay rent, so we were able to come to a partial rent payment agreement with our landlord. Although we were holding up our end of the deal with our partial rent payments, our landlord immediately started sending my mother passive aggressive messages, indirectly hinting towards a future eviction. It wasn't worth putting up with her vague threats so we all started pooling our money fully towards rent. That meant several weeks of no groceries at a time. That meant going months without medications some of us need to take regularly because we could no longer afford it. That meant my brother taking on odd jobs and risking his health to make even just a little bit more money. That meant my mother, who has pre-existing conditions, desperately attempted to take on more hours of work just to make a little bit more money. Receiving this kind of financial assistance means my family gets to buy groceries this week with just a little less worry. You have no idea how excited I am to have fresh fruit again. So thank you so much for providing us with this kind of support, it absolutely means the world to us."
- "My mental stability has been greatly impacted. Many family members are leaning on me for information, mental and economic support, and to provide resources. We have recently had a recent loss in the family and in addition to grief, there is increased financial stress as many family members are currently unemployed due to the COVID-19 pandemic."
- "We have to choose between buying food or having clean clothes because we can't do both. We don't know how we are going to pay our rent for the next month because even with the stimulus check it's not enough. We pay \$1,600 for our apartment."
- "I live with multiple people with preexisting health conditions that make it difficult to leave the house. My parents are unemployed as a result of COVID and I was forced to move home after my college campus shut down and I was no longer able to afford paying housing fees"

In conclusion:

Due to how the lines are currently drawn, resources are not being allocated to communities in need. For example, the city of Fullerton has a clear income-divide between North and South Fullerton. The lack of rent control in POC majority communities in Fullerton are distinctly different from Central North and Northwest Fullerton. We want to ensure that Fullerton is split at Chapman Ave to reflect income level and allow for shared experiences of community members during the pandemic, including housing resources and financial aid needed for undocumented folks.

Again and again, the needs of our underserved communities such as Asian American, Latinx, Pacific Islander, immigrant, and low income communities of color are not addressed. Even when immigrant communities do want to get involved, there are obstacles such as language barriers, accessibility, time restraints, and even more that further distance folks from being able to use their voice. Now more than ever, it is time for this to change. It is crucial that our communities are kept together because they share similar struggles and experiences. By staying together, we have a stronger voice to ensure that policymakers will address our needs.