

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

Date: October 1, 2021

Zone: J (Orange County)

Area: Anaheim

Name: Rashad Al-Dabbagh

Organizational Affiliation: Arab American Civic Council (People's Redistricting Alliance)

Community of Interest: Little Arabia

Direction: Keep Little Arabia whole

Introduction:

Hi, my name is Rashad Al-Dabbagh. I am writing on behalf of the Arab American Civic Council. Our organization builds Arab American community power by facilitating their civic participation in Orange County. 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.

My community is:

Our community of interest is the Arab community. Arab Americans in Orange County are diverse in culture and faith, and originate from more than a dozen countries in the Middle East and North Africa region. The Arab community is also diverse in its socioeconomic status, education levels, and immigration status. Some came as refugees or asylum seekers, others for better opportunity. The Arab community in Orange County is bound together by a shared history, language, and geography.

My community is located:

While our community is scattered around Orange County, there's a significant number of residents in West Anaheim around what is unofficially known as Little Arabia, which is on and around **Brookhurst Street primarily between Crescent Avenue and Katella Avenue**. Little Arabia is home to more than one hundred small businesses, including ethnic grocery stores, restaurants, cafes, hair salons, halal butcher shops, and professional services, as well as religious institutions such as the West Coast Islamic Society, and nonprofit organizations and social service organizations that serve the community in various capacities.

My community is similar to the following neighborhoods:

Little Arabia is similar to other neighborhoods in the region in that it is diverse in its faith, socioeconomic status, countries of origin, education, immigration status, and more. The mosques and Arabic language churches as well as social service providers in Anaheim's Little Arabia have continued to embrace the community around them and

provide services and resources to their neighbors, regardless of ethnic backgrounds or religious affiliations. These communities should be kept together in the same interest.

My community is different from the following neighborhoods:

My community is different from neighboring communities because it's a cultural destination and a safe space for Arabic-speaking communities as well as refugees and immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa region. This area is the center and hub of the Arab community in Southern California.

What makes my community special is:

Anaheim's Little Arabia is a safe space for Arabic-speaking immigrants as well as other immigrants and refugees from the Greater Middle Eastern region. I personally often visit Little Arabia as a new immigrant when I first moved to Southern California because of the community that existed here. It was my home away from home. Since then Little Arabia has grown, and what has to offer has multiplied. While we don't have accurate data on our community due to the fact that the Census Bureau counts Arabs and other 'Middle Eastern' folks as White, we know this is a destination for them whether to shop, do business, or receive a service they need. A week ago, while attending a vigil for Afghanistan, I had a conversation with an Afghan refugee who told me that he's been in this country for six years and has lived in Anaheim because this is where he feels safe. While Afghans aren't Arabic speakers, the fact that there are Middle Eastern grocery stores, Mosques, and social service providers in the area keeps him and his family in the city.

In conclusion:

It is important that the Arab community be taken into consideration in the new district maps. Our community, like many other communities, works together to support one another, share resources, and advocate for needs. It is important that these communities be kept together, to empower their voices, and to continue building these strong ties.