

**From:** [Jeanine Erikat](#)  
**To:** [COSD, Redistricting](#)  
**Subject:** [External] Letter to County IRC  
**Date:** Thursday, December 2, 2021 8:44:50 AM  
**Attachments:** [Community Organizations Letter to County IRC.pdf](#)

---

Good morning,

I hope you're doing well. Please see below the letter attached from a broad base of community organizations in San Diego County. We hope the Commission can read this letter prior to today's meeting.

Please contact me if you have any questions.

Thank you so much,

Jeanine

--

**Jeanine Erikat (she, her, hers)**

Policy Associate

**Partnership for the Advancement of New Americans — PANA**

4089 Fairmount Ave, San Diego, CA 92105 — [pana.sd.org](http://pana.sd.org)





Partnership for the  
Advancement of  
New Americans



Karen Organization  
of San Diego



SAN DIEGO  
Refugee Community  
COALITION



PILLARS  
OF THE COMMUNITY



CAIR  
CALIFORNIA



United Women  
of East Africa  
Support Team



December 2, 2021

San Diego County Redistricting Commission

1600 Pacific Highway

San Diego, CA 92101

*Sent via electronic transmission*

***Re: PANA and BIPOC Community Map***

Dear Commissioners:

Thank you for your continued service and commitment to conducting an equitable, transparent, and inclusive redistricting process. We are writing to you to reiterate and provide further context to the district we submitted in the PANA/BIPOC map. While we did not submit a whole map— we would not be so presumptuous as to map the whole county— we did submit a map that represents our communities of interest in one district that meets all of the redistricting criteria.

Over the past year PANA, Majdal Center, Pillars of the Community, Asian Solidarity Collective, and our partners have worked diligently to engage the Black, Asian, East African, Arab, Afghan, Middle Eastern and Muslim communities in City Heights, La Mesa, Spring Valley, Lemon Grove, Encanto, El Cajon, and Rancho San Diego in redistricting. Our organizations participated in a very intentional, non-partisan, community-driven process to understand our shared priorities and discussed whether and why we should be kept together. We want to turn your attention back to:

- Our organizations held 25 community education and mapping workshops on redistricting.
- This included sessions in incredibly diverse languages including: English, Somali, Oromo, Swahili, Arabic, Dari, and Pashto.
- During this process, communities were also able to identify the social demographic characteristics, economic interests, and their shared policy priorities such as economic development, criminal justice, mental health services, and housing.
- Nearly 300 community members attended public workshops to identify their communities of interest.
- An additional 200 people called in to tell you about this community in support of the BIPOC/PANA district map.

The commission presented an exciting opportunity for our community to finally be seen and heard. The consistent message that emerged from the hundreds of conversations we held from the past year and a half, even before the commission was seated, was the strong desire to be kept together. Outlined below are the common themes, policy priorities, and facts about why these communities should be kept together.

**Surveillance and Criminalization.** This year we commemorated the 20 year anniversary of the Global War on Terror in which domestic policies and programs were implemented that surveilled, harassed, and

criminalized our Black, Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim, and South Asian communities. Locally, our communities work together to stop this criminalization and surveillance of our communities.<sup>1,2</sup>

**Social Services.** According to a report from the Center on Policy Initiatives, Lemon Grove, La Mesa, Spring Valley, and El Cajon all had poverty levels that were higher in 2018 than they were in 2007.<sup>3</sup> In particular, El Cajon had the highest poverty rate and the largest percent of growth in poverty among East County Cities. The communities of Encanto and City Heights also experience similar economic challenges as residents in these neighborhoods are extremely low-income earners.<sup>4</sup>

**Refugee Policy.** San Diego County welcomes more refugees than any other California county.<sup>5</sup> And the County determines allocation of resettlement funding. Therefore, refugees have a vested and critical interest in direct representation in county government so that they have a voice in shaping policies that will lead to welcoming and successful resettlement. This is more critical than ever given this particular moment in the world. It is very likely that our region will experience the second largest resettlement of Afghan refugees in the State.<sup>6</sup>

**Social Institutions.** Thousands of Iraqi, Syrian, and Afghan refugees have resettled in the City of El Cajon, a community which has been dubbed as California's "Little Baghdad."<sup>7</sup> City Heights has historically been referred to as "Little Mogadishu" due to its sizable Somali community.<sup>8</sup> As a result, these neighborhoods have seen the growth of worship centers, ethnic based restaurants, grocery stores, and outlets that sell home goods and cultural products.

We know you have an incredibly difficult task ahead of you with many interests and criteria to balance. We have heard from local government leaders advocating to preserve the status quo, and in particular keep whiter communities in East County in their current districts. This nostalgia for the past overlooks the county's changing demographics and maintaining this status quo harms our communities.

The beauty of our county is its rich diversity, and we hope the lines drawn leave room for diversity to flourish and keep communities of interest together so they can advocate for more just and equitable policies that support family sustaining jobs, healthy housing, and more intentional resettlement policies that help all San Diegans.

Sincerely,

---

<sup>1</sup> Irani, Lilly. "San Diego shouldn't approve gun surveillance technology without community input." *San Diego Union Tribune*, 29 June 2021,

<https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/opinion/commentary/story/2021-07-29/shotspotter-gun-surveillance-tech-san-diego>.

<sup>2</sup> Marquis, Eric. "Creepy 'Smart' Streetlight Cameras In San Diego Can't Be Turned Off." *Jalopnik*, 24 Nov. 2020, <https://jalopnik.com/creepy-smart-streetlight-cameras-in-san-diego-cant-be-t-1845747074>.

<sup>3</sup> "Poverty, Income and Earnings in East County, 2018." *Center on Policy Initiatives*, 22 Oct. 2020, <https://cpisandiego.org/poverty-income-earnings-east-county-2018/>.

<sup>4</sup> "The Pervasive Impacts of Rent Increases in City Heights." *USC Price*. [https://socialinnovation.usc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/City-Heights-Brief\\_11.8B-1.pdf](https://socialinnovation.usc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/City-Heights-Brief_11.8B-1.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Aguilera, Elizabeth. "San Diego welcomes more refugees than any other California county." *Cal Matters*, 23 June 2020. <https://calmatters.org/justice/2017/07/san-diego-welcomes-refugees-california-county/>.

<sup>6</sup> Hernandez, Sophia. "San Diego expecting 2nd highest influx of Afghan refugees in the state." *ABC 10 News*, 30 Oct. 2021. <https://www.10news.com/news/local-news/san-diego-expecting-2nd-highest-influx-of-afghan-refugees-in-the-state/>.

<sup>7</sup> Zablitz, Laura. "Little Baghdad, California: Refugee restaurant owners bringing Iraqi cuisine to San Diego County." *Los Angeles Times*, 6 Dec. 2018. <https://www.latimes.com/food/dailydish/la-fo-re-little-baghdad-20181206-story.html>

<sup>8</sup> Burks, Megan. "San Diego's Somali Population Explained." *KPBS*, 22 Feb. 2013. <https://www.kpbs.org/news/living/2013/02/22/san-diegos-somali-population-explained>.

Ramla Sahid  
Executive Director  
Partnership for the Advancement of New Americans

Malcolme Morgan  
Muslim Organizer  
Pillars of the Community

Tazheen Nizam  
Executive Director  
Council on American Islamic Relations, San Diego

Ramah Awad  
Programs Manager  
Majdal Center

Abdi Mohamoud  
Executive Director  
Horn of Africa

Sadad Ali  
Executive Director  
African Coalition Workforce

Nao Kabashima  
Executive Director  
Karen Organization of San Diego

Dilkhwaz Ahmed  
Executive Director  
License to Freedom

Amina Sheik Mohamed  
Chair  
San Diego Refugee Communities Coalition

Sahra Abdi  
Executive Director  
United Women of East Africa Support Team

ASC Core Members  
Asian Solidarity Collective

Abraham Tessema  
Executive Director  
Refugee Assistance Center

Ojeni Touma  
President  
American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, San Diego