

From: applications.administrator@capitol.local
To: [Senate Redistricting](#)
Subject: INETMAIL: Redistricting Public Input
Date: Saturday, September 25, 2021 6:51:05 PM

Date: 2021-09-25
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Affirm public info: I agree

Regarding: Senate

Message:

I write concerning the proposed Senate District map and, in particular, the proposed Senate District 13, 17 and 18 maps. I am a resident of Fort Bend County. I currently reside in Senate District 18, and I am represented by Sen. Lois Kolkhorst. I am Asian American, specifically Indian American. I live in a precinct (Fort Bend Precinct 4135) and a neighborhood (Telfair) that is predominantly Asian American.

I am concerned that the proposed Senate District maps do not adequately reflect the growth in the Asian American community and instead dilute the voting strength of Asian Americans by dividing our communities over the three Senate districts – SD13, SD17 and SD18. Recent data shows that while Fort Bend County has a 23.5% Asian American voting-age population, the voting-age population of the proposed districts is only 12% for SD13, 12.9% for SD 17, and 12.7% for SD 18. It is evident that predominantly Asian American neighborhoods and precincts that are near or adjacent to one another have been split between the three districts when they could be combined into one. For example, Precinct 4102 in SD 18, which is 75% Asian American, is adjacent to Precinct 4129 in SD 17, which is 61.6% Asian American, which is adjacent to Precinct 4044 in SD 13, which is 70% Asian American. In fact, it appears from the map that the proposed Senate District 17 carves a path right through Asian American communities in order to add more precincts with larger percentages of white people.

Within the Asian American community, Fort Bend County is home to precincts with the highest concentrations of South Asian Americans in Texas (people of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Sri Lankan origin, among others). Although South Asian American communities are very diverse, our communities are also tied together in myriad ways by common immigration stories, appearance, language, religion, food, dress and even occupations. We proudly elected K. P. George, who is the first South Asian American County Judge in Texas. Fort Bend County Court-at-Law Judge Juli Mathew is the first Indian American woman to be elected judge in the United States. Fort Bend County Precinct 4 Constable, Nabil Shike, is the first South Asian American and first Muslim to hold that post. Our collective voting strength as South Asians within Fort Bend enabled us to achieve these firsts. But, in the proposed Senate District maps, the precincts in Fort Bend County with the highest concentrations of South Asians are split between the three Senate Districts – Precinct 4147, 4135 in SD 18, Precinct 4129 in SD17 and Precincts 4065 and 4044 in SD 13.

Rather than being grouped with largely non-Christian, suburban, South Asian American communities nearby, we are tied to predominantly white, Christian, rural communities a hundred miles away. So, while Senator Kolkhorst's regular references to the Bible and scripture in social media posts may be warmly received by many, the same posts make my community feel unseen and unwelcome. You will not find a single social media post by Sen. Kolkhorst to celebrate Ramadan or Diwali, for example, in spite of the fact that her district is home to some of the largest mosques and Hindu temples in the Houston metropolitan area. By diluting our voting strength, we are unable to select leaders who openly accept and respect our religions. We need better, more responsive representation and more opportunity districts for our communities, including in coalition with other people of color and immigrant populations with similar values and needs.

The Senate Districts divide communities in other ways. The map divides the County, the City of Sugar Land and Fort Bend ISD into multiple Senate Districts. For example, one of my daughters attends elementary school in Senate District 18 and my other daughter attends middle school in the proposed Senate District 13. The high school they are zoned to sits in Senate District 17. The proposed maps even divide Home Owners Association neighborhoods like Riverstone (which is divided between SD 13 and SD17).

Finally, the Asian American community isn't the only community harmed by the proposed maps. The census showed that 95% of all growth in Texas occurred in the African American, Latino, and Asian American communities. Any fair map must reflect the diversity of our state. The current draft maps do not allow any new opportunity district based on these census numbers in metroplexes, like Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, and Austin. Instead, they pack and crack our communities and dilute our votes. I urge this committee to comply with the Voting Rights Act and respect the reality of the new census by allowing people of color the opportunity to choose the candidates of their choice.

I urge this committee to hold additional in-person and virtual hearings that allow public input from the entire state and to create a new Senate map that reflects our community input and the census data, as well as create fair districts for US Congress and TX House. In addition, please continue to allow a fair and open process by providing at least 14 days for the public to review additional maps, 5 days to review any changes to proposed maps, keeping a record of all documents, written communications, emails, text messages, and draft maps, and providing analysis of how the new maps impact historically disenfranchised communities of color.

Thank you.

Regards,

Lakshmi Ramakrishnan

