

COALITION OF ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICANS FOR FAIR REDISTRICTING (CAPAFR)

CAPAFR-FRESNO

*Written Testimony to the California Citizens Redistricting Commission
Public Input Hearing: April 15, 2011 in Hanford, CA*

Deanna Kitamura
Asian Pacific American Legal Center

I am Deanna Kitamura, the Statewide Redistricting Manager at the Asian Pacific American Legal Center (also known as APALC). Thank you for your concerted effort in holding public hearings throughout California. I am a native of Fresno so am happy to see the Commission in the Central Valley. APALC is the largest nonprofit organization in the nation dedicated to providing legal services to and advocating for the civil rights of the Asian American and Pacific Islander communities. APALC is the statewide anchor for CAPAFR, that's the Coalition of Asian Pacific Americans for Fair Redistricting. My colleague, Eugene Lee, provided a fairly comprehensive introduction of CAPAFR at the February 26 commission meeting devoted to receiving information on efforts to educate the public on redistricting. As mentioned by Eugene, CAPAFR is a nonpartisan coalition working in 10 regions in California. Each CAPAFR region has a local lead organization conducting outreach and convening a series of regional meetings.

In this region, CAPAFR is working in Fresno County, and the regional coalition is called CAPAFR-Fresno. CAPAFR-Fresno's efforts are led by Fresno Center for New Americans, a community based organization serving the refugee communities in Fresno. CAPAFR-Fresno has held three community meetings to educate the community, obtain neighborhood and community of interest information, and obtain community mapping priorities. CAPAFR-Fresno will hold one more meeting next month to finalize the mapping proposals affecting Fresno County.

Statewide, CAPAFR believes in the importance of the Voting Rights Act in protecting the voting rights of racial minorities. CAPAFR also believes in the importance of keeping neighborhoods and communities of interest together so that community voices are not diluted in the redistricting process. In this region, CAPAFR-Fresno recognizes and supports a potential Latino Voting Rights Act district that can be drawn that includes the southern part of the City of Fresno.

CAPAFR will present statewide assembly and senate mapping proposals at the May 26 hearing in Northridge. Today, we will focus on a specific neighborhood and community of interest. We will not discuss district lines, other than to note and support the potential Latino Voting Rights Act district I just mentioned.

The four other speakers for CAPAFR-Fresno will primarily focus on the Hmong refugee community. Some of the speakers will focus on a specific Hmong refugee neighborhood in the southeast portion of the City of Fresno. This neighborhood is also home to large pockets of Lao and Cambodian refugees.

Let me introduce the other speakers:

Fuehoua Thao, from the Fresno Center for New Americans, will provide information about members of CAPAFR-Fresno. She will also discuss the Hmong community in Fresno and how that community shares many similarities with the Latino community, and, therefore, should be included in the Latino Voting Rights Act district in the southern part of Fresno.

Silas Cha, Southeast Asian Education Council, will speak about the historic and current significance of the Hmong refugee neighborhood within the City of Fresno.

Jennifer Rakaphoumne, a realtor serving the Southeast Asian community, will talk about the expansion of the neighborhood eastward due to the growth and success of the community.

Finally, Dan Ichinose of APALC will provide data that supports the community's testimony, including their arguments that the neighborhood in the southeast portion of Fresno should be kept together and that the neighborhood should be included within the potential Latino Voting Rights Act district in the southern part of the City of Fresno.

At the end of our presentation, we will submit our written testimony and the shape file for the Hmong refugee neighborhood that Silas Cha will describe.

Thank you for this opportunity to present information about Fresno.

Speaker #5

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Fuehoua Thao
Fresno Center for New Americans

Good evening, my name is Fuehoua Thao. I want to thank you the Commission for holding a hearing in this region and allowing us to provide our testimony in person. I am a program associate at Fresno Center for New Americans.

Fresno Center for New Americans is a nonprofit, nonpartisan community-based organization in Fresno; it has been in existence since 1991 to provide services in employment development, cross-cultural trainings, health education, and advocacy.

FCNA is the lead organization for CAPAFR in Fresno County. As the lead, FCNA conducted outreach and convened regional meetings. CAPAFR-Fresno encompasses all of Fresno County. Some of the groups/organization that make up CAPAFR-Fresno are:

- o UC Cooperatives, Small Farmers Program
- o Empowerment Institute
- o Lao Veterans of America
- o Hmong International New Year
- o Hmong Farmers of America
- o Cambodian Reconciliation Committee
- o Southeast Asian Education Council
- o Lao Family Community of Fresno
- o Khmer Society of Fresno

CAPAFR-Fresno understands and supports a Latino Voting Rights Act district that can be drawn that includes the southern part of the City of Fresno and extending southward. We also believe the commission should keep communities of interest and neighborhoods whole.

Fresno has the second largest Hmong community in the nation. It is estimated by the various respective community leaders that there are:

- o 30,000 Hmong population,
- o 8,000 Laotian,
- o 7,000 Cambodian in Fresno County.

We understand that the Census estimates are lower for each community. We believe this is due to an undercount of our communities.

The Southeast Asian community shares many socio-economic traits with the Latino community, such as poverty and unemployment. Dan Ichinose will be providing you some of the statistics to show the parallels between our two communities.

Because of these similarities, FCNA works with Latino community based organizations. For example, FCNA has worked (in the last couple years) with other Latino organizations like:

- The Binational Center for the Development of the Oaxacan Indigenous Communication and
- Parent Institute for Quality Education – advocating on student education and the impact of budget cut on education.

Because of the common work that we do and our shared socio-economic characteristics, the policy interests of the Southeast Asian neighborhood are best served if it is kept whole and included with the Latino community in the Voting Rights Act district.

Thank you for your attention and consideration of my testimony.

Speaker #6

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Silas Cha
Southeast Asian Education Council

Good evening, my name is Silas Cha. Thank you for holding the hearing in the region and allowing us to provide our input in front of you. I am the chairman of the Southeast Asian Education Council, a non-partisan advocacy group in Fresno that conducts educational conferences, outreach, and public presentations such as this to educators and other services providers. The Council is consisted of educators, community leaders, college students, and parents who are passionate about the quality of their children's education. Our members are from the Southeast Asian community and Latino community.

I have lived in Fresno for nearly 30 years. In fact, I grew up in Southeast Fresno, the area we will be discussing.

I am also a member of CAPAFR. I fully support the importance of the Voting Rights Act and in keeping communities of interest and neighborhoods whole. Please respect our community's desire for fair representation. We urge you not to dilute our votes and please do not arbitrarily divide our neighborhood.

Within Fresno, there is a neighborhood in which the core of the Southeast Asian community resides. The boundaries are Shields to the north; Highway 41 to the west until Belmont. From Belmont south, the western boundary is First Street. Jensen is to the south, and Temperance is to the east. The map we are projecting is of this neighborhood and the red gradations reflect the Hmong population, with darker color showing higher concentration. The stars show the location of refugee community institutions.

This neighborhood has been and continues to be a gateway community for Southeast Asians: Hmong, Lao and Cambodians.

I am particularly familiar with the Hmong history in this region so will focus much of my comments on the Hmong settlement in Fresno. Hmong families left their homelands in 1975 and initially settled in various cities in the United States. Fresno was not one of the initial cities. However, by the end of the 1970s, families began to resettle in other areas. The first Hmong families in the Central Valley settled in Merced in 1979. About a year later, Hmong families started to move to Fresno. The Hmong refugees started resettling in this area because of the affordable rent and rich agricultural land nearby. The Fresno area has lower income residents and thus it has been attractive to Hmong and other Southeast Asian refugees who could not afford to live elsewhere.

By the mid-1980s, there was a visible number of Hmong refugees who resettled in Fresno. A steady flow of Hmong people continued to resettle in Fresno. The refugee camps in Thailand began closing in 2004. About 4,000 of the 16,000 refugees from the Thai camps settled in Fresno.

The majority of Hmong, Lao, and Cambodian refugees who resettled in Fresno reside in the neighborhood I have identified. In fact, even many of the Southeast Asian farmers who lease land to the south and east of the neighborhood actually live in the neighborhood. Michael Yang, from UC Cooperative's Small Farm Program, estimates that about 40% of the Southeast Asian farmers live in the neighborhood. Staff at the Small Farm Program also indicate that the farmers are unique in that, while the majority of farmers in Fresno County own their land and live on their farms, the majority of Southeast Asian farmers lease their land and do not live on the land.

The refugee neighborhood I identified has fundamental historical and cultural significances and has been a vital area of importance to Southeast Asian communities. There are notable organizations/institutions in the neighborhood that continue to provide vital services. For instance, Fresno Center for New Americans, Fresno Interdenominational Refugee Ministry, Khmer Society of Fresno, and Lao Family Community of Fresno are at the center of this neighborhood - providing essential services in job development, community organizing, childcare, and mental health. These institutions are on the map.

Another important institution is the Asian Village Mall. It is located at Winery and Kings Canyon. It is significant in that it houses 40 businesses which are primarily owned by Southeast Asians. The mall includes a grocery store, restaurants, and small businesses. It was the first Southeast Asian mall in Fresno. It is significant for establishing entrepreneurs. It is also significant because many events are held at the mall's community hall.

The refugee neighborhood also contains the Fresno Fairground. This is the site of the largest Hmong cultural celebration in the world. It is the celebration of the New Year and has taken place on the Fairgrounds every year for the last 23 years and attracts 120,000 people during the 6-day celebration. Hmong people from all over the world attend this event. Because they spend time in the area, Hmong people all over the world recognize the area as a Hmong refugee neighborhood.

In order to best serve the interest of the Hmong and other Southeast Asian residents of Fresno, it is imperative that you keep this neighborhood whole. The neighborhood often advocates for policies affecting the Southeast Asian residents with local, state, and national officials and agencies in issues such as education, health, unemployment. Therefore, the neighborhood should be kept in one district in order that we can provide a consistent and strong voice to work with officials and state agencies.

Thank for your attention and consideration of our input.

Speaker #7

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Jennifer Rakaphoume

Good evening, my name is Jennifer Rakaphoume. I am a community activist and a Real Estate Broker by profession. I thank the commission for holding a hearing in the region and allowing us to provide our input in person.

I reside in the Fresno neighborhood Silas described and have family members and many friends living in the Fresno region. I work and travel widely in the Fresno area because of my job.

I am a member of CAPAFR, and I support the importance of the Voting Rights Act and in keeping communities of interest – whole.

I also support the broader principles that have been articulated by the other speakers for CAPAFR. Please respect our community's desire for fair representation. Please do not dilute our votes and please do not arbitrarily divide our neighborhood.

As a realtor, I am intimately familiar with the neighborhood described by the previous speaker, Silas Cha, in which the core of the Southeast Asian community lives. The neighborhood boundaries have grown over the course of the years. In the past, very few developments within our neighborhood existed east of Clovis Avenue. However, new developments have been built in the last couple of years. The current trend is that many Hmong and other Southeast Asians are moving east by purchasing homes between Clovis Avenue and Temperance. I have sold many homes over the past 5 years in the existing and new subdivisions within this area. And the easterly trend is not stopping at Temperance Avenue. I have also sold homes to Southeast Asian families in Sanger. The motivating factors are: increased income, the affordability of homes, the proximity to the land which many farm, lower crime, accessibility to schools, freeways and preserving the cultural value of living near extended family.

In addition to my experience as a Real Estate Broker, I have an understanding of the Southeast Asian farming community because my family owns a local Asian market in the neighborhood Silas described. Although Southeast Asians farmers lease land in different areas within Fresno, the agricultural land in our neighborhood continues to grow local ethnic produce. And much of the produce is supplied by the local farmers who live in our neighborhood.

Any decision that will divide this neighborhood will be detrimental to its stability and negatively affect the Southeast Asian community here.

Thank you for your attention and consideration of our input.

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Daniel Kikuo Ichinose, M.A.
Asian Pacific American Legal Center

My name is Dan Ichinose and I direct the Demographic Research Project and Census Information Center, or CIC, at the Asian Pacific American Legal Center. The CIC program is an official program of the United States Census Bureau designed to promote the dissemination of census data to underserved populations. I am here to present data supporting the testimony you've just heard.

The latest census data show that Asian American and Pacific Islander communities are a large and growing part of Fresno County's demographic landscape. Table Fresno 1 shows the size of these communities and their growth.

Table Fresno 1: Asian American and Pacific Islander Population in Fresno County, 2000 and 2010¹

Group ²	2000		2010		2000-2010
	Population	% of Population	Population	% of Population	% Growth
Asian American	65,863	8%	91,715	10%	39%
Pacific Islander	682	< 1%	1,066	< 1%	56%
TOTAL POPULATION	799,407	100%	930,450	100%	16%

¹ United States Census Bureau, 2000 Census SF 1 and 2010 Census PL94-171.

² Race categories compliant with Office of Management on Budget (OMB) guidance on aggregation and allocation of data on race for use in civil rights monitoring and enforcement (OMB Bulletin No. 00-02).

According to the 2010 Census, nearly 92,000 Asian Americans and 1,100 Pacific Islanders live in Fresno County, making up roughly 10% of the county's total population. Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are among Fresno's fastest growing racial groups, increasing in size 39% and 56% respectively between 2000 and 2010. In contrast, the county's total population grew only 16% over the same period.

Fresno County's largest Asian American and Pacific Islander ethnic group are Hmong Americans. According to the Census Bureau's 2007-2009 American Community Survey Three-Year Estimates, there are over 26,000 Hmong Americans living in Fresno County. We expect this figure to reach 30,000 when new 2010 Census data capturing the size of ethnic communities are released later this year. Indeed, the county's Hmong American population is the nation's second largest, second only to Ramsey County, Minnesota in size. Roughly half of Fresno County's Hmong American population resides in the Hmong Refugee Neighborhood, as outlined by Silas.

One of the priorities expressed by CAPAFR – Fresno today is to draw Fresno's Hmong refugee Neighborhood into the county's Latino voting rights seat. Asian Americans in the area,

especially Hmong Americans, share much in common with Latinos. Table Fresno 2 also features data from 2007-2009 American Community Survey Three-Year Estimates.

Table Fresno 2: Characteristics of Fresno County Population by Race, Ethnicity¹

Group ²	% Living Below the Poverty Line ⁴	% Unemployed ⁵	% Without High School Degree ⁶	% Limited-English Proficient ⁷
Asian American	22%	9.5%	28%	35%
Hmong American ³	38%	13.7%	49%	49%
Latino	28%	12.0%	47%	31%
Non-Hispanic White	10%	7.5%	9%	2%

¹ United States Census Bureau, 2007-2009 American Community Survey Three-Year Estimates Selected Population Profiles.

² Characteristics determined for population alone or in combination with other groups.

³ Characteristics of other Asian American ethnic groups not available in 2007-2009 American Community Survey Three-Year Estimates Selected Population Profiles.

⁴ Percent of individuals based on income received during the last 12 months (2009 inflation-adjusted).

⁵ Percent of civilian labor force 16 years-of-age or older.

⁶ Percent of individuals 25 years-of-age or older.

⁷ Percent of individuals 5 years-of-age or older who speak English less than 'very well'.

The second column captures the percent of a given group that lives below the poverty line, inflation-adjusted to 2009. Approximately 22% of Asian Americans and 38% of Hmong Americans in Fresno County live in poverty. While 28% of Latinos countywide live below the poverty line, only 10% of non-Hispanic Whites do.

The third column shows the percent of a given civilian labor force 16 years-of-age or older that is unemployed. Roughly 10% of Asian Americans and 14% of Hmong Americans are unemployed, compared to 12% of Latinos and only 8% of non-Hispanic Whites.

The fourth column captures the percent of a given group 25 years-of-age or older without a high school degree. Approximately 28% of Asian Americans and almost half of Hmong Americans haven't finished high school. While nearly half of Latinos are also without a high school degree, only 10% of non-Hispanic Whites are without one.

Finally, the fifth column shows the percent of a given group that is limited-English proficient, or face some difficulty communicating in English. Roughly 35% of Asian Americans and 49% of Hmong Americans are limited-English proficient, compared to 31% of Latinos and only 2% of non-Hispanic Whites.

These data show that Asian Americans and Latinos share similar poverty rates, levels of unemployment, levels of educational attainment, and rates of limited-English proficiency. In contrast, Asian Americans in Fresno have very little in common with non-Hispanic Whites.

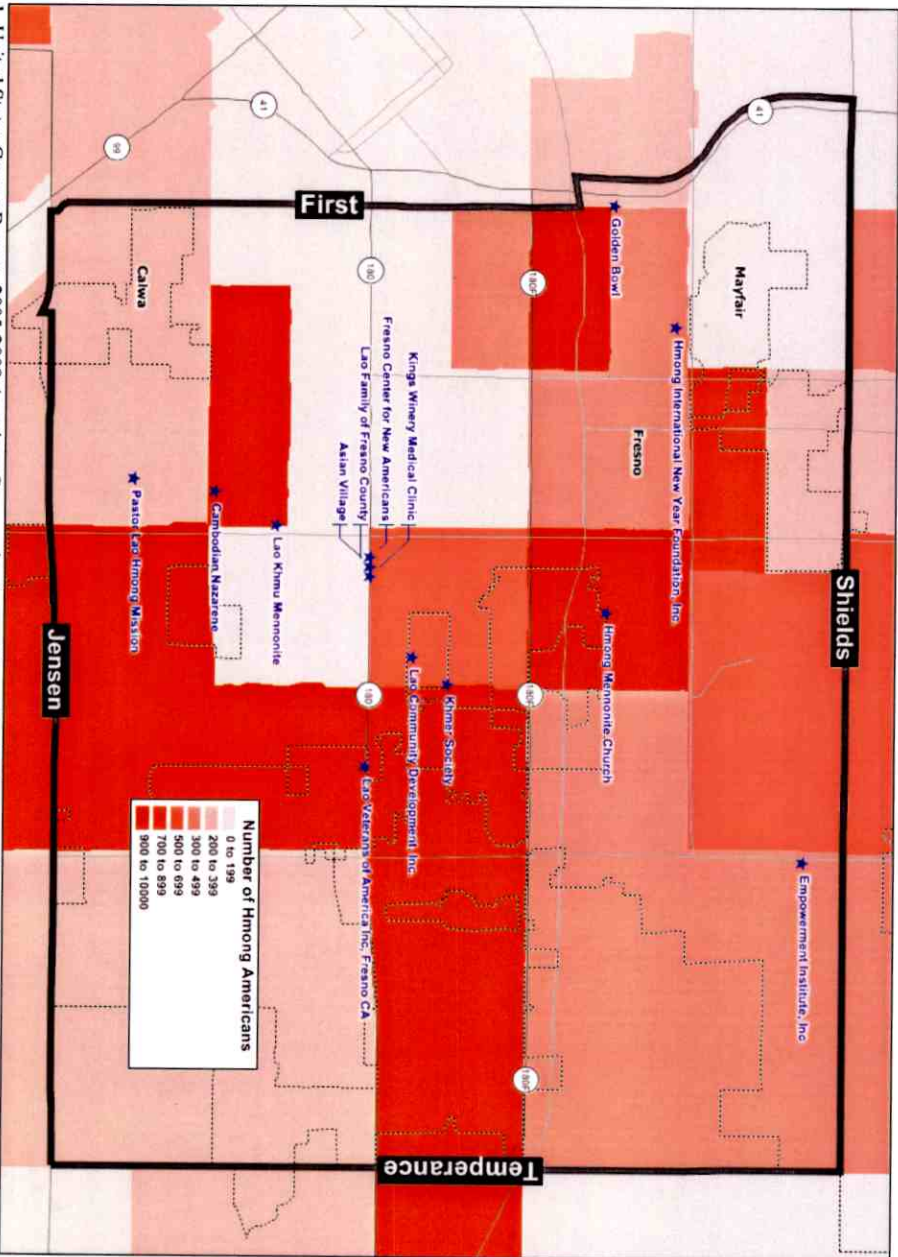
In summary, CAPAFR – Fresno asks the Commission to (1) respect the integrity of the Hmong Refugee Neighborhood outlined by Silas in the redistricting process and (2) recognize common interests shared by Hmong American and Latino communities by drawing the Hmong Refugee Neighborhood into the county's Latino voting rights seat that includes the southern part of the City of Fresno. We thank you for the opportunity to make this presentation to the Commission. We hope it proves useful in your efforts to respect the interests of Asian American, Pacific Islander, and all communities in the redistricting process.

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Map Submitted in Support of Testimony Presented to the California Citizens Redistricting Commission
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Map Fresno 1: Number of Hmong Americans in Hmong Refugee Neighborhood, Fresno County, 2005-2009¹



¹ United States Census Bureau, 2005-2009 American Community Survey Three-Year Estimates. Number determined for population alone.