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# El Concilio de Fresno

NON-PROFIT CONSORTIUM

A UNITED EFFORT  
FOR A STRONGER  
COMMUNITY

P.O. Box 4236 Fresno, California 93744-4236



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## Presentation to the California Citizen's Redistricting Commission

My name is Venancio Gaona. My address is [REDACTED] in Southeast Fresno, 93727. I am chairperson of El Concilio de Fresno Inc., (El Concilio) a community based nonprofit organization. El Concilio advocates for the socio-economic and educational advancement of the Latino community in the County of Fresno.

I shall testify on behalf of El Concilio de Fresno and myself. We request this Commission to consider and develop assembly and senatorial districts that will consider factors and traits such as the ones I shall describe in my neighborhood and community as evidence to support a community of interest argument.

**Boundaries:** The following are general boundaries of an area of concern in the City of Fresno. The northern boundary is Shields and the southern American Avenues. The eastern boundary is Minnewawa Street and the western is Marks Avenue.

**Residents/Population:** The County of Fresno has over 900,000 residents. The City of Fresno has about 1/2 of the county's population. The residents I shall refer to are about the southern half of the City of Fresno. The residents of this area are predominantly low and middle class, and there are pockets of upper-middle and upper class. In this area there is a population that is represented by many ethnic groups such as Mexican-Americans, Hmong, Laotian, Indian, Cambodians, and some Central American immigrants, as well as Caucasians.

**Education:** Since 1960, there has been a flight of Caucasian population to the north of Fresno and to the northeastern city of Clovis. This presented the Fresno Unified School District (FUSD) the problem of "de facto segregation" in its schools. Currently FUSD is the 4<sup>th</sup> largest school district in the state. It has a student population of approximately 75,000. 20,662 are in English Learner's Program or 27.3% of the students. 80.7% of the students are eligible for free or reduced meals. Ethnically the largest student groups are; Hispanic 61.9%, Asian 13.1%, African-American 10.7% and Caucasian 12.7%. There is the on-going District concern for the dropout (one year 5.9%) and graduation rates (4 year rate of 70.2%).

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The District also has to improve some of the outcomes in some its schools or lose funding special state funding. The District continuous to address the large number of student expulsions policy and its impact on relations with parents.

**Problem and Impact on Minority Students:** The FUSD Board of Trustees now finds itself trying to maintain the integrity of the District because the northwestern high school Bullard parents are trying to secede. In their effort to secede they are enticing neighboring Fresno High School parents to join them. The irony is that the group "Bullard Pride" first approached the Anglo parents at Fresno High, when these said "no", it is now approaching Latino parents. This is a manifestation of how minority people find themselves impacted and manipulated by those who have the political clout.

**Unemployment:** This southern area of Fresno reflects, also, the high unemployment rate of the county's 18.2%, which is 50% higher than the statewide average of 11.2%. This area of the city also has a significant number of legal and undocumented persons from various counties, especially Mexico and Central America. It is unfortunate that Fresno's economy is so tied to agriculture, and in a way has limited the development of other kinds of jobs that might improve employment and income.

**Health-Care:** residents from this area, in order to receive health services, must travel to northern Fresno, especially along Herndon Avenue for specialized care. There is one hospital in the central core – Community Medical Center. Farther north on Dakota Ave. is Sierra Hospital, but Kaiser Permanente is north of Herndon on Fresno Street and St Agnes is located on Herndon and Millbrook and the CMC Health & Lunch Hospital is also north of Herndon.

**Recreation:** There are more parks in northern Fresno and have better maintenance conditions than the fewer found in southern portion. At two community centers Romain and Holmes, you would find that the lawns were not maintained even at the height of full city service, now with the cutbacks they are in worse conditions.

**Library Services:** I have served close to 5 years on the Fresno County task force to bring about a new Fresno County main library to replace the current one downtown. It is now on "hold". Unfortunately, for some unknown reason, the new Woodward Park Library, which features an indoor waterfall, was built in a very affluent part of northeast Fresno was approved and built quickly.

**Rural Conditions:** These socio-economic etc., conditions can also be found in West Fresno and in the rural communities of the county. While doing research for the Fresno Redevelopment Transportation Plan, El Concilio's surveys found rural areas lack

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adequate transportation. While there is public transit, it is limited. Fresno Ministry, a local nonprofit organization, has identified lack of transit service in rural communities as the greatest hurdle to health care access.

**Lack of City Attention:** The predecessor of the current mayor of Fresno was Mr. Alan Autry, who on several occasions described Fresno as the “Tale of Two Cities” that the northern part of Fresno had amenities that SW and SE Fresno did not have. He was correct.

Another distinction between north of Shields Avenue and south is the lack of citizen participation and voting in elections. The northern areas not only vote, but they vote in significant numbers vs. the voting rate in the southern part. In the most recent Fresno mayoral election of November 2008, the distinction was something like 70 to 30 percent of the voters voted for the north end candidate Swarengin instead of the Latin candidate from southeast Fresno, Henry T. Perea.

We hope your commission, in its wisdom and through its ambitious task, will consider these factors when developing new boundaries for assembly and senate districts. Changing demographics, the high unemployment rate, the gradual curtailment of quality public education, the lack of access to health care and the recession have an impact on how residents respond and participate in their communities. They must be able to feel they have representative government that listens and responds to their needs.

Thank you. Gracias.

