

El Concilio de Fresno

NON-PROFIT CONSORTIUM

Fresno, Calif. 93774

A UNITED EFFORT
FOR A STRONGER
COMMUNITY



May 23, 2011

California Citizens Redistricting Commission
1130 K Street, Suite 101
Sacramento, CA 95814

Honorable Commissioners:

This letter is a continuation of an oral presentation made before your Commission on April 15, 2011 at the Hanford, CA hearing (tenth speaker). I request this testimonial letter be entered as part of the public comments regarding Redistricting in the State of California.

My name is Venancio Gaona, a retired educator. My address is 5209 E. Hamilton Avenue 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.

In drawing state Congressional, Assembly, Senate and Board of Equalization Districts, it is essential that each district's "Community of Interest" reflect similar characteristics that meet your Commission's prioritized criteria. What was presented on April 15 and now in this letter meets the "intent" or "letter" of your established criteria.

Our neighborhood and "Community of Interest" is Southeast Fresno and its "contiguous" and "compact" surrounding areas.

Boundaries:

Northern Boundary (West to East): W. Shields Ave., east to Vagedes St., south to McKinley Ave., east to Railroad tracks (by Fresno City College), north to W. Shields Ave., east on Shields Ave., to Chestnut Ave.

Eastern Boundaries (Northeast to South):

Chestnut Ave., south to McKinley Ave., east to Peach Ave., south to Olive Ave., east to Clovis Ave., south to East Kings Canyon Ave., west to Peach Ave., and south to E. Annadale Ave.

Southern Boundaries (East to West):

East Annadale Ave., west to Railroad tracks.

Western Boundaries: (Southwest to North)

Railroad tracks to S. Orange Ave., north to Church Ave., west to East Ave., north to Santa Fe Railroad tracks, (near Hazelwood Ave.), northwest along the S.F. Railroad to Divisadero Ave., west to N. Weber Ave., northwest to W. Shields Ave.

Residents/Population: The County of Fresno has (2010 projections) over 949,961 residents. The City of Fresno has over ½ of the county's population (505,479). The residents referred to here reside in the southern half of the City of Fresno. The residents are predominantly low and middle class, with pockets of upper-middle and upper class. This area's population is comprised of many ethnic groups;

2.

Mexican-Americans, Hmong, Laotian, Indian, Cambodians, African-American and Central American immigrants, and Caucasians.

Education: Since 1960, there has been a flight of Caucasian residents to northern Fresno and the City of Clovis. The Fresno Unified School District (FUSD) has had to address “de facto segregation” in its schools. FUSD is the 4th largest school district in the state. It has a student population of approximately 75,000. More than 70 languages are spoken by the students and their families. 20,662 students are in English Learner’s Program or 27.3%. 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%). The District must also continue to improve outcomes in some its schools or lose special state funding. The District has to address the large number of student expelled, and its policy and its impact on relations with parents.

Current Problem & Impact on Minority Students: The FUSD Board of Trustees currently has to maintain the integrity of the District. The northwestern high school Bullard parents are trying to secede from the District. In their effort secede from the District, they are enticing neighboring Fresno High School parents to join them. The irony is the group “Bullard Pride” recently first approached the Anglo parents at Fresno High. When these responded “no”, Bullard Pride then approached 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 also reflects the high unemployment rate of the county’s 18.2%, which is 50% higher than the statewide average of 12.2%. This area also has a significant number of legal and undocumented persons from various counties, especially Mexico and Central America. Unfortunately Fresno’s economy is tied to agriculture and it has limited the development of other kinds of jobs that might improve employment, income and especially educational opportunities in the county and in particular in the city.

Health-Care: Residents must travel to northern Fresno, especially along Herndon Avenue for health services and 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.

Library Services: I have served close to 5 years on the Fresno County task force to bring about a new downtown Fresno County main library. It is now on “hold”. The new Woodward Park Library, which features an indoor waterfall, was approved and built quickly in a very affluent part of northeast Fresno.

Cultural & National Activities: There are many cultural activities planned and directed by the ethnic minority communities in Southeast Fresno: The Hmong New Year celebration at the Fairgrounds for two weeks. The Chinese New Year and the Cinco de Mayo celebration are held. Cinco de Mayo is held at two different but inclusive sites (Fulton and Manchester malls) within SE Fresno. The Cesar E. Chavez Celebration (March 31) is held at the Saroyan Theatre. Martin Luther King Jr. days are celebrated downtown. Special festivities such as ethnic food fairs are held also at the downtown Fulton Mall during the summer months. The Art Americas building (Mexican-American) and the African-American Museum are also located downtown. The Veteran’s parade and the Fourth of July are also conducted downtown.

3.

Rural Conditions: These socio-economic etc., conditions can also be found in West Fresno, in the rural cities and communities of the county. While doing research for the Fresno Redevelopment Transportation Plan, El Concilio's surveys found rural areas lack 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 previous mayor of Fresno was Mr. Alan Autry, on several occasions described Fresno as the "Tale of Two Cities." He was correct, the northern part of Fresno has amenities that SW and SE Fresno do not have even today.

Civics/Voting Participation: Another distinction between north of Shields Avenue community and southern one 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 Mrs. Swearengin instead of the Latino candidate from southeast Fresno, Mr. Henry T. Perea.

Citizens need to feel and have hope that government is responsive to their aspirations, dreams, and basic needs as tax payers. Having representative government is essential to citizens believing that government is responsive to its citizenry. Citizens must see that government provides the opportunity for one of their own to be elected who will respond to their concerns.

We request the commission, in its wisdom and through its ambitious task, will give high priority to these factors when developing new boundaries for assembly and senate districts where it impacts Southeast Fresno and its community of interests:

1. Changing demographics
2. High unemployment rate
3. Gradual curtailment of quality public education
4. Continued cost of post secondary education
5. City of Fresno bureaucracy's lack of attention to the area
6. High cost and un accessibility to health care
7. High rate of home foreclosures, and
8. Recession's impact on persons in low to middle income levels & how residents respond and participate in their communities.

Cordially,



Venancio G. Gaona, chair

[REDACTED]
Fresno, CA 93727

Telephone: [REDACTED]

Enclosure: Maps