



To: the California Citizens Redistricting Commission

This commission has thus far shown itself to be tone deaf to the concerns of rural California. First, it ignored the northern, rural stretches of California by not selecting a commissioner north of Sacramento. Then the Commission created subcommittees for regions combining small rural counties with larger suburban and urban counties.

The Commission created this structure without displaying these regional maps until literally minutes before their adoption. "It should have been" is not an excuse or justification. Each of you as commissioners said that you valued transparency and an open, public process, but your adoption of regional maps was not undertaken with a level of transparency and openness those watching this process expect.

It is particularly problematic that the Commission's justification for using these regions is their use for census outreach without providing meaningful opportunity for the public to tell you if they have been working for that task. As someone who has been actively organizing in Region 1 and Sacramento County surrounding the census for the last 2 years, I can tell that Region 1 has many subregions and we had to adapt our strategies depending on the county or area we were holding meetings, in-person or virtual.

One of the biggest areas of concern during census organizing in Region 1 was that we had to use different tactics and strategies in our urban counties and our rural ones. I think this is information you could and should have had prior to deciding on your regional map.

I think leveraging existing infrastructure makes sense, but first you must ensure that infrastructure will work for the Commission's purpose. The Commission must also recognize that you are sending signals to the public that these are the regions you're going to use for outreach. The rural communities throughout California hear your signal – "You Don't Count!"

I do not believe this is your intent, but unfortunately, it is the effect of your actions thus far. But it is the effect. I would humbly suggest three simple fixes:

* Request the subcommittee on Region 1 to conduct its work and report to the full body based on two subregions: 1A) Northern California; 1B) Sacramento/Yolo.

* Request the subcommittee on Region 4 to conduct its work and report to the full body based on two subregions: 4A) Gold Country; 4B) Central Valley (San Joaquin to Merced).

* Request whenever staff produce materials referring to these regions, a disclaimer be included that these are not the regions adopted for future outreach meetings.

None of this should require a vote. Just you agreeing to act before you further lose the confidence of a large swath of the state. You have the chance to demonstrate your commitment to rural California.

As a Hmong daughter of refugees who grew up in Butte County, I know firsthand how many in the north believe Sacramento ignores them. Please do not set the Commission on a path forward that continues to echo this message.

We all know that you can do better.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Maikhou Thao'.

Maikhou Thao, Everyday Impact Consulting