



November 9, 2020

San Diego County Redistricting Commission
1600 Pacific Highway
San Diego, CA 92101
Transmitted electronically

Re: Selection of Remaining Commissioners to the San Diego County Redistricting Commission

Dear Commissioners-Select:

Congratulations on your selection to the San Diego County Redistricting Commission. You are now entrusted with important responsibilities that will shape San Diego’s democracy for a decade. One of your earliest and most critical responsibilities is the selection of the six remaining commissioners. We write today regarding the significance of your legal obligation “to ensure that the commission reflects the county’s diversity, including racial, ethnic, geographic, and gender diversity.” Cal. Elec. Code section 21550(g)(2).

Our organizations include good government, civil rights, advocacy, and ethnic-based direct service organizations throughout San Diego County. We envision and strive for a representative democracy that reflects the rich ethnic, racial, economic, and political diversity of San Diego County. Redistricting will not only dictate our political and electoral power for the next 10 years it will also directly impact all aspects of life throughout the County, including but not limited to economic opportunity, access to healthcare and mental health services, education equity, public safety, and making our region a welcoming and non-discriminatory place for refugee and immigrant communities.

As you are aware, the random drawing to select the first eight commissioners resulted in five White commissioners, one Latinx commissioner, one Asian commissioner, and one commissioner who declined to provide information on racial and ethnic identity. None of the selected eight commissioners have self-identified as Black, American Indian, African immigrant, or Arab, Muslim, Middle Eastern, or South Asian (sometimes referred to collectively as AMEMSA communities).

As a result, the current makeup of the Commission stands in stark contrast to the ethnic and racial diversity of San Diego County which, based on the United States Census Bureau’s July 1, 2019 [population estimates](#), is only 45% White, and is 34.1% Latinx, 12.6% Asian, 5.5% Black, 1.3% American Indian and Alaska native, and .6% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander.¹ This is in addition to significant numbers of other racial and ethnic communities represented in the County’s diverse refugee and immigrant communities. A [report](#) conducted by the director of the U.S. Immigration Policy Center at UC San Diego entitled “Immigrant Integration in the City of San Diego,” found that about 27.1% of the city’s population is foreign-born and speaks 70 different languages. Notably, the report found “the fastest

¹ “U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: San Diego County, California; California,” Census Bureau QuickFacts, July 2019, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/sandiegocountycalifornia,CA/PST045219>.

growing foreign-born populations in the City of San Diego come from Syria, Kenya, Sudan, Iraq, and Nigeria.”

In a majority-minority County that is less than 50% non-Hispanic White, a lack of representation on the Commission from the diverse racial, ethnic, immigrant, and refugee communities who live and work throughout the County would be unacceptable. Fortunately, you have the power, *and the legal obligation*, to rectify the dramatic underrepresentation of these communities in the applicant pool and in the random drawing when you make your determinations regarding the final six commissioners.

The statutory scheme that governs your selection of the final six commissioners accounts for the very scenario with which you are presented. Indeed, Election Code section 21550(g)(2) specifically prescribes the criteria you are required to apply when selecting fellow commissioners, including that they reflect the county’s “racial, ethnic, geographic, and gender diversity.” You are thus legally required to examine the racial and ethnic makeup of the Commission and, in doing so, must ensure they reflect the County’s diversity.

Concerningly, out of an initial pool of 300 applicants for the commission, only 18 of those selected for the pool of the 60 most qualified applicants identified as a race or ethnicity other than White. Only two of those were selected in the random drawing, leaving only six Latinx, five Asian, and four Black, and one American Indian applicant in the pool from which you will select your fellow commissioners. However, while the applicant pool of diverse candidates is small, we are confident that if you thoughtfully apply the required criteria to the remaining applicants in the pool, you can seat a Commission that better reflects the rich diversity of our great County.

We understand that in addition to racial and ethnic diversity, you must balance statutory political and geographic diversity requirements, and must select commissioners who demonstrate a deep appreciation and understanding of the “diverse demographics and geography of the County of San Diego.” Elec. Code section 21550(c)(7). Selecting commissioners who bring this awareness and sensitivity to the redistricting process, through their lived experiences, professional work, volunteerism, academic study, or some other means, is a critical factor that must be weighed when evaluating the finalists. For example, the neighborhood of City Heights has 95,000 residents living in approximately 6.5 square miles within San Diego—42.4% of which are foreign born²—and is one of the hardest hit communities by the pandemic with an unemployment rate of 17.6%.³ Ensuring there are commissioners who have lived and understand these challenges will be critical to ensuring their interests are represented in critical county decisions over the next decade.

Congratulations again on your selection to the Commission and for your service on the first ever San Diego County Independent Redistricting Commission. We wish you the best of luck as you start the important work of leading a transparent, fair, and independent process. Choosing a truly representative

² “City Heights,” *The California Endowment*, <https://www.calendow.org/places/city-heights/>

³ “COVID-19 Impact on the San Diego Regional Economy,” *SANDAG*, August 19, 2020, https://www.sandag.org/uploads/publicationid/publicationid_08182020.pdf



Commission is the first critical step you will take to ensure the public will have greater confidence in your work, will be encouraged to participate in the process, and will have faith in the final maps you will produce. We look forward to working with you over the coming year. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Jeanine Erikat, Community Organizer, Partnership for the Advancement of New Americans at jeanine@panasd.org.

Best regards,

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Mike Geck
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