



October 21, 2021

The Honorable Bill Wells
Councilmember Gary Kendrick
Councilmember Michelle Metschel
Councilmember Steve Goble
Councilmember Phil Ortiz

200 Civic Center Way
El Cajon, CA 92020

Re: El Cajon Communities of Interest

Dear Mayor Wells and City Council Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide community input in the City of El Cajon's 2021 Redistricting process. On behalf of the Majdal Center and community residents of El Cajon, we write to you today to identify our largely Arabic-speaking community in El Cajon as a community of interest and urge you to keep these communities whole, as demonstrated in the attached mapping shape file.

The Majdal Center is a resource hub and community center located on East Main Street in El Cajon, that supports over 300 Arab refugee and immigrant families in El Cajon and across San Diego County. El Cajon is home to a diverse population of refugees and immigrants, including a high concentration of Iraqi, Syrian, Palestinian, and Afghan communities throughout the city whom we work closely with.

State law requires that cities keep communities of interest together to the extent practicable in a new district map. See , Cal. Elec. Code § 21621(c)(2). As you are aware, the Federal and State 2020 Census data fails to accurately capture our community. This shortcoming in the data places a particular importance on our mapping workshops and our oral public and written testimony engagement in the public process, as it captures our communities more accurately where the Census does not.

In addition, similar to the 2016 districting process, the community and demographers can utilize other data to better understand our community of interest, such as other languages spoken as a proxy for Arab-speaking households. [According to the 2020 Census Data](#), over 43% of the households in El Cajon speak a language other than English at home, with 18% of those respondents checking the "Other Language" category.

Arab community leaders and residents of El Cajon held 5 community mapping sessions since July 2021 with over 100 community members in attendance. Through this engagement, we have learned that our Arab community members reside within two major blocs within the city of El Cajon.


- (1) The first Arab community bloc in El Cajon can be defined by these boundaries: Greenfield Drive to the north, North Johnson Avenue to the west, North Second Street to the east, and East Lexington Avenue to the south.**
- (2) The second Arab community bloc we have identified can be defined by these boundaries: East Lexington Avenue to the north, Emerald Avenue to the west, Jamacha Road to the east, and West/East Chase Avenue to the south.**

A shapefile and pdf of our community map is attached to this letter for your reference while drafting the new district lines.

According to [San Diego County's Refugee Arrival Data for FFY 2020-2021](#), over 1,500 refugees have resettled in San Diego in the past year alone. El Cajon has historically resettled high numbers of refugees who rely on strong community networks for mutual aid and support. The Arab immigrant and refugee community in El Cajon experiences high rates of hidden homelessness, with families doubling up in the same home to afford rent. As a newcomer community, the majority speak a primary language other than English at home, and are limited English proficient. Our refugee and immigrant communities also have shared needs such as increased affordable housing, equitable transportation access, and English language services.

We ask that the city council and redistricting staff listen closely to the voices of the refugee and immigrant community in El Cajon, and their collective needs to ensure a fair and equitable mapping process. Thank you for your leading this important work for the residents of El Cajon. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Yasmeen Obeid, Redistricting Fellow, Majdal Center at yasmeen@majdalcenter.org.

Sincerely,



Ramah Awad
Programs Manager
Majdal Center

CC: City Manager Graham Mitchell
City Attorney Morgan Foley, J.D
City Clerk Angela Cortez, CMC