

Communities of Interest Testimony

A template for community members

Sharing your “community of interest” testimony at a redistricting hearing is a powerful way of shaping your community’s district maps for the next decade to come. With just a little preparation, it can be easy to do. Imagine describing your community to a visitor from out of town. Your community can be as small as your block, your neighborhood association, or the network of parents who all send their kids to the same school or participate in the same Little League. Or it can be expansive, including everyone in your city or county that speaks the same language as you, everyone who rents their homes and struggles to pay the bills, or everyone in a particular part of town that suffers from under-investment and poor services.



What is a community of interest? A community of interest is your community. It can be a neighborhood, network, or group of people who have common interests in local politics and decisionmaking and would benefit from being grouped into a single district. Think about a simple way to describe what you and your neighbors share in common, and what makes your community unique when compared to surrounding communities. Remember -- you are the expert on your community!

Why is a community of interest important? Keeping communities of interest together is an important principle in redistricting. It can be especially helpful to communities that have been traditionally left out of the political process. Community members can define their communities by telling their own stories and describing their concerns to line-drawners who are leading the redistricting process.



Keeping communities of interest whole in the redistricting process is one of several required redistricting criteria in California. While there are no concrete rules on how to define a community of interest, this worksheet will guide you through the basic elements to help you describe your community to your redistricting body, which could be your city council, board of supervisors, or school district, or a redistricting commission.

Template Script:

Hi, my name is _____. I have [lived/worked] in the [community/city] of _____ for ____ years.

I'd like you to keep my community together [in single district / in district ____].

My community is:

Describe your community by stating your shared interests and your shared characteristics. This can include your community's social and economic demographics, narratives about your community's history and culture, or anything else. There is no right or wrong way to describe your community. Just make sure to mention what connects your community together. The following questions can guide you and can prompt your thinking about how to describe your community of interest.

- Who lives in your community?
- What kinds of things do they do for a living?
- What kind of housing is common?
- What kind of city services do you have or don't have?
- Are there strong social and civic networks?
- Are there important places where people come together, like community centers, churches, temples, neighborhood associations, or parks?
- Do you have common interests in any local political issues, like schools, housing, crime, transit, health, land use, environmental conditions, or other issues?
- Do you have a common race or ethnicity? Immigration history? Language spoken?
- Does your community have shared socioeconomic characteristics, like income level or education level?
- Does your neighborhood have celebrations or traditions, like street festivals or parades?
- Are there nonprofits or service-providers rooted in the community?
- Is there a place that is the largest employer?
- What is the history of how your community came together?



Template Script:

My community is located:

Your city council, board of supervisors, or redistricting commission need to know where your community is physically located so they can keep it whole and within a single district. Here are questions that will help you describe the location of your community.

- What are the streets or boundaries that mark your community's borders?
- What are the significant landmarks: rivers, parks, shopping areas, historic sites, etc.?
- What are the gathering places and service providers: business districts, schools, community centers, religious places, and social service agencies?
- Do the current political district boundaries divide your community? Or do they keep your community together?



My community is similar to the following neighborhoods:

My community is different from the following neighborhoods:

Provide a description of how your community is different from or similar to the communities and neighborhoods around you.

Template Script:

What makes my community special:

Highlight community issues and histories (in personal stories, if possible) that help demonstrate the importance of having elected officials who understand and respond to community needs. Share stories and data about community concerns to show how you feel your voices have been heard, or haven't been heard, by your elected representative.

- Has your community come together to advocate for important services, like more translated information, or health centers in your neighborhood?
- Have you won victories together, or established traditions together?
- What harms have been caused because your voice has been ignored, like poor health caused by pollution from nearby coal plants or industrial farms? What are the barriers to solving these issues?

In conclusion.....

Emphasize why it's important for your community to be kept together in the new district maps. Thank the members of the redistricting body (city council, school board, commission, etc.), provide them with any written testimony and materials, acknowledge your community members and partners in attendance, and restate your goals.

