

Communities of Interest Testimony

A worksheet 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 friend who wants to move there.** 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 the community 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-drawers who are leading the redistricting process.



Keeping communities of interest whole in the redistricting process is may be a redistricting criterion in your state or recognized by courts as a relevant consideration. 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, state legislature or redistricting commission.

TIP:
Check out who is in charge of redistricting. Find out if there are time limits on speaking. Plan ahead.



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, [name of community], together.

[Describe your community...]

Name your community. Describe your community by stating your shared interests and shared characteristics. This can include describing the people who live in your community, stories about your community's history and culture, or the special needs of your community. There is no right or wrong way to describe your community. Just make sure to talk about **what connects the people in your community**. Think about these questions as you craft 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 government services do people need?
- Are there social or civic groups that people belong to?
- Are there important places where people come together, like community centers, schools, churches, temples, neighborhood associations, or parks?
- Do you have common interests in local political issues, like school funding, access to hospitals, health or environmental problems, 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?
- What nonprofits or service-providers serve the community?
- Are there large employers? Are there lots of small businesses?
- What is the history of how your community came together? How has your community changed over time?



Template Script:

My community is located:

The people in charge of drawing the official district maps 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: 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 these neighborhoods:

My community is different from these neighborhoods:

You may want to describe 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 (tell a personal story, 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 your community needs to be 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 a nearby plant or freeway? 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.

