



Asian & Pacific Islander American Vote- Michigan

Written Testimony for the Michigan Senate Committee on Redistricting

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Michigan
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Thank you for the opportunity to be here today and share some information with you as you make very important decisions about redistricting.

Asian and Pacific Islander American Vote - Michigan is a nonpartisan nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization that serves the Asian Pacific Islander American (APIA) community through civic participation, advocacy, and education. The APIA community includes Pacific Islanders and Native Hawaiians, South Asians, Southeast Asians, East Asians, multiracial Asians, and anyone who self-identifies as Asian.

As you may know, the Census 2010 data showed that the APIA population is the fastest growing population in Michigan. Our state's APIA population grew by 34.9% from 2000 to 2010. In some cities, the APIA population more than doubled in that time span. More detail about our state's APIA demographic is provided later in this testimony.

Our growing APIA communities should be kept geographically together to avoid vote dilution in areas of density and growth. APIA community members and voters deserve to be able to elect representatives that will be held accountable to our communities' needs and issues. In this testimony, I will describe why APIAs should be considered a community of interest.

We believe that redistricting can be done to empower voters to choose candidates they feel best represents them and their community; if done wrongly redistricting can result in politicians choosing their own voters and not feeling particularly responsible for other voters.

We hope this committee will keep our growing APIA communities in mind while drafting new maps, so that our communities can elect candidates that we believe best represent our shared interests and needs. As an organization dedicated to encouraging the APIA Michigan community to be informed, educated and engaged voters, we want to make sure our votes – our voices -- are counted. We urge this committee to keep APIA communities geographically together as much as possible during the redistricting process. We look forward to sharing proposed district maps with you in the coming weeks; these maps are in the process of being developed.

Our Community:

The U.S. Census Bureau released Michigan's Census 2010 data in March. We learned that the APIA community is the fastest growing population in Michigan, growing 34.9% between 2000 and 2010. The APIA community is also the fastest growing population nationwide, at 43%.

- Asian + NHPI alone 240,803
- Asian & NHPI multiracial only 52,963 (18% of total API population is multiracial)
- Asian + NHPI, multiracial together 293,766
- The highest APIA population is in Oakland County with 68,082 APIAs, followed next by Wayne with 46,319, Washtenaw with 27,237, and Macomb County with 25,242.
- The fastest APIA growth is in Macomb at 48.3%, Ingham at 41.25%, Oakland at 37%, Ottawa at 35.27%, and Washtenaw County at 33.1% growth rates.
- Macomb County saw the fastest growth in the state, more than doubling in population at 55.3%, including multiracial APIAs, or 48.3% of APIA alone.
- Novi saw 113.22% growth in APIA population, followed by Hamtramck at 100.96% and Canton at 91.08%.
- 22% of the growth in the Asian American population from 2000-2010 (grew by 61,689 people) is accounted for by the growth in the Asian American population younger than 18 years old.
- These figures would be higher if we included the increasing multiracial APIA populations.

Communities of Interest:

APIAVote-Michigan considers the growing APIA communities in Michigan as communities of interest that should be kept geographically together as practicable. We consider APIA communities as communities of interest based on shared racial, ethnic, cultural similarities and needs, languages spoken and language access needs and issues, policy concerns, voting patterns, what industry they work in and types of jobs they hold, and can also include geographically-relevant centers and facilities serving these communities such as places of worship, schools, and community service centers.

We also recognize that these communities of interest may be considered politically cohesive, a claim we are investigating further. In 2008, 9 out of 10 Asian and Arab voters in Michigan voted Democratic for President Obama, and 81 percent voted for Democratic Congressional candidates. Asian American voters were concerned with 3 top issues during the presidential race, including Economy/Jobs, Foreign Policy/War in Iraq, and Health Care¹.

In 2008, 98% of Asian and Arab American voters voted for the Democratic incumbent while 2% voted for the Republican challenger in the 13th Congressional District. That same year, 84% of Asian and Arab American voters voted for the Democratic incumbent while 12% voted for

the Republican challenger in the 15th Congressional district. 82% of Asian and Arab American voters voted for the Democratic candidate in the Eleventh Congressional District, while 68% of Asian and Arab American voters polled voted for the Democratic candidate for Congress in the Ninth Congressional District. In 2006, the majority of Asian Americans in Southeast Michigan exit polled were also Democrats. Unfortunately, there is no 2002 API exit poll data found so far for Michigan as that exit poll data was scrapped due to problems. The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research’s 2000 exit poll for Asian Americans in Michigan found that 13.4% voted for Gore, 78.0% for Bush, and 8.6% for Nader.

APIAs have had historic barriers to voting and participating fully in the political process. From the 1790s when Asian Americans were “aliens ineligible for citizenship,” to the Chinese Exclusion Act of the late 1800s that was later extended to most other Asian Americans by 1924²; to Asian-only segregated schools for Asian American youth that only ended nationwide in 1954², Asian Americans have faced institutional and legal barriers to participating fully in civic life.

During their 2008 Presidential and US Congressional election exit poll, the Asian and American Legal Defense and Education Fund found instances of limited English proficiency within Michigan’s APIA population. Sixteen percent of respondents throughout Michigan were limited English proficient (LEP). Among native Bengali speakers in Detroit, 45% were LEP, with 27% preferring to vote with language assistance. In Hamtramck, 40% of native Arabic speakers were LEP, with 29% preferring to vote with language assistance.¹ Many of the respondents preferred voting with language assistance or used an interpreter, as the list below describes³

Locality	Language Minority Group	Limited English Proficient	Prefers Voting with Language Assistance	Used an Interpreter	Used Translated Materials
Dearborn	Arabic	27%	18%	21%	11%
Detroit	Bengali	45%	27%	*	*
Hamtramck	Arabic	40%	29%	16%	*

72% of APIA voters surveyed in AALDEF’s exit poll were foreign-born naturalized U.S. citizens, with 28% born in the U.S. 8% had no formal U.S. education. 43% were first-time voters. The five largest ethnic groups surveyed in Michigan were Asian Indian (25%), Arab (24%), Chinese (23%), Bangladeshi (15%), and Korean (5%).¹

Even today, Asian Americans face discrimination and language access issues voting. Michigan does not provide bilingual voting ballots for APIA voters, nor does any Michigan county voluntarily provide bilingual assistance (in an Asian language) on Election Day that we know of. APIA Vote does provide some bilingual assistance where we have the capacity to, to assist in completing voter registration forms, however, and has helped coordinate the translation of voter education information in the past.

Our communities have particular needs and deserve the ability to elect representatives who will feel responsible and be responsive to APIA communities’ needs. We are concerned about the possibility of having our communities split up during redistricting. Should that be the case, some APIA voters’ ballots cast may be diluted politically.

We recall a classic worst-case scenario in history, when the only Los Angeles APIA City Councilmember had his district redrawn in 1980's. His district was split up into four City Council and five State Assembly districts. After the Los Angeles race riots in 1992, there was \$1 billion worth of damages concentrated in Asian and Korea town businesses. When Asian Americans appealed to their local representatives, each representative passed the buck saying it was someone else's district. No legislator felt primarily responsible or accountable to the Asian American community there. We hope that such a problem would not happen here, and this is just one example of why we think it's important to keep APIA communities together.

In drafting new maps, we urge this Committee to adhere to making compact and contiguous districts while respecting city and township boundaries, and as close to equal population as possible. We propose that APIA communities of interest kept together by block groups from the census data. We also propose that APIA communities of interest with similar densities are kept together as much as possible, unless population guidelines necessitate otherwise.

We are in the process of drawing proposed state house and senate district lines for areas in the state with the highest APIA populations and very much look forward to sharing these with you in the near future.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

¹ Asian and American Legal Defense and Education Fund, *The Asian & Arab American Vote in Michigan 2008*.

² Asian American Justice Center, Senate Hearing http://www.advancingequality.org/files/VRA_Senate_Hearing_Statement_706.pdf

³ See page 19, Asian and American Legal Defense and Education Fund, *The Asian American Vote in the 2008 Presidential Election, NY, NJ, MA, PA, VA, MD, DC, MI, IL, LA, TX, NV*. <http://www.aaldef.org/docs/AALDEF-ExitPoll-2008.pdf>

⁴ Battle State--Michigan General Election Exit Poll: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut. http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/elections/2004/battle_states/michigan.html

⁵ Center for Urban Studies, January 2001 Wayne State University. Working Paper No. 7; http://data.memberclicks.com/site/apacc/asians_wayne2001.pdf

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