

3/18/21

Co-Chairs Taylor, and Salinas, Vice-Chairs, Knopp, and Boshart-Davis, and members of the redistricting committee,

My name is Ira Cuello-Martinez and I am a lifelong resident of Salem and Marion County currently living in House District 22. My family and I have lived in Salem for over two decades and are very familiar with the city and surrounding areas. My parents came to Salem because of family members who already lived in the area, but decided to stay in Salem because of the rich agriculture in the county and the easy access to the city. We grew up loving the city, but as I grew older, I also became aware of some disparities when it came to our demographics and elected officials. In particular, the Salem Keizer school district has over fifty percent students of color while the Salem Keizer School Board has no representation for these students. Although there are many things we love about the city, there are also some improvements that could be made for the benefit of our communities.

I want to share my story and the community of interest I belong to. I grew up in a low income neighborhood where I was able to make friends who shared similar experiences of having parents who spoke a foreign language. The older kids in our neighborhood would support the younger ones with homework, but more importantly, we always had a crew to go play at the nearby park. Our parents were also close and we supported each other in times of need. If someone needed a babysitter, our neighbors were there. If someone needed some milk, our neighbors were there. If someone needed a job, our neighbors were there. Our neighbors and friends understand what we've been through and what we're going through. At the end of the day, we support each other to the extent possible because we know each other best.

Our community also has vested interest when it comes to state legislation. For example, I vividly remember when Oregon stopped issuing driver's licenses to undocumented immigrants and we relied on our neighbors for rides to school, sports games, and other essential trips. Fortunately, the immigrant community in my neighborhood and district mobilized to build political power to ensure our concerns were heard and addressed by the state legislature. However, it took over a decade of organizing to secure this big victory for our communities. This is just one example of the importance of keeping communities of interest together to address our shared concerns.

Oregon has great additional resources like the PSU Population Research Center to start looking at important data. We also have access to the American Community Survey, school districts, and housing developments data. This information gives us the opportunity to start the redistricting process before the census data is available. Once we have the census data then we can re-engage the community with maps made using census information. It is important to note Oregon's history of discrimination against BIPOC since we know that these communities have historically voted as blocs and ensuring that this continues is of the utmost importance. Finally, I want to express the difficulty of engaging in redistricting with the lack of example maps. I ask to be provided something concrete to look at that would help the community engage with this process.

As we go through redistricting, I want you all to prioritize the following considerations: 1) impacted communities need to be centered in the process and outcome 2) Oregon should not delay the process given that we have sufficient, credible, and available data to begin redistricting and 3) feeling represented in your district.

I look forward to working with this committee and the Oregon legislature to ensure that redistricting engages with low income and immigrant communities and that it responds to our growing needs. The legislature's process for engaging Oregon communities in redistricting is going to be critical.

Thank you very much for your time and work on this issue.

Ira Cuello-Martinez