

Good Morning Chair Taylor, Chair Selena and members of the committee,

My name is May Saechao, and I live in Multnomah County, in Congressional District 3. I am a native Oregonian, first generation born from refugee parents. I am here with APANO to represent my community of IU Miens. I will share some of the reasons why it is so important to make choices that are truly reflective of the residents of OR. I will also explain why representation matters, and why redistricting decisions impact unknown communities like mine.

Many of you, if not all, wonder, who are the IU Miens? Let me tell you a little bit about us. We are not like many people who you will hear from. You won't find us in the Census data, nor do we appear in many other official reports, we are virtually non-existent. We are a small indigenous hilltribe group from the mountainous regions of SE Asia and East Asia. We resettled here in Oregon for close to 4 decades now, as long as some have been in office. Majority of us were granted asylum after helping the US government fight in the covert Secret War. Our passage was also made possible because of such acts as Nationality Act of 1965 and the Refugee Act of 1980, all laws intended to help a majority group that we were aggregated into.

IU Miens and other SE Asian communities are heavily concentrated in District 3 where many have invested their lives, where many started and continue to call home. We are working families, we are students and children, we are established business owners, we are seniors, we are residents who live, work, and play in this district. For small unknown minority groups like us, it is important to keep communities of interest together in order to sustain the growth we have made and the shared issues we face as a group. Because of the lack of representation, we rely on the strength of our IU Miens and other social and community advocates, people who we've built personal connections to.

Most recently, in crises like the pandemic and last year with the SE Asian deportation of Lao nationals, it was through the collective power of other SE Asian communities, partners, and some elected officials, that we were able to troubleshoot these problems together. Splitting our community through redrawing boundary lines dilutes our voting power, in addition to dividing us in political decisions that affect thousands of us as a whole. For us IU Mien, representation is not only important on who is our elected official, but the community of people that represents who we are as a group. It is also a good reminder that involvement of the community is absolutely crucial in projects such as redistricting. I stand here today because of people who are in positions that share similar backgrounds, who know of my people. People like me.

As I close this, I want to thank the Chairs of this committee and it's members, for allowing my voice to be heard. I want to challenge and encourage everyone to make a commitment to engage in more ground level work, to learn about the true diversity of your constituents. I hope today is not the last or the end of this conversation, but the start of one of many discussions to be had, not just to those who look like me, but to the many other underrepresented groups we have yet to learn about. Alone we are strong, but together we are stronger.