



January 21, 2022

The Honorable Bill Wells  
Councilmember Gary Kendrick  
Councilmember Michelle Metschel  
Councilmember Steve Goble  
Councilmember Phil Ortiz

200 Civic Center Way  
El Cajon, CA 92020

***Re: El Cajon Arabic-speaking Community of Interest***

Dear Mayor Wells and City Council Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide community input in the City of El Cajon's 2021-2022 Redistricting process. On behalf of the Majdal Center and community residents of El Cajon, we write to you today to identify our largely Arabic-speaking community in El Cajon as a community of interest and urge you to keep these communities whole, as demonstrated in the attached GIS ShapeFile and public submitted [Map 112](#).

The Majdal Center is a resource hub and community center located on East Main Street in El Cajon, that supports over 300 Arab refugee and immigrant families in El Cajon and across San Diego county. El Cajon is home to a diverse population of refugees and immigrants, including a high concentration of Iraqi, Syrian, Palestinian, and Afghan community members throughout the city whom we work closely with. The majority of the Arabic-speaking community whom we support in El Cajon are immigrants and refugees resettled in the past decade, low-income renters, employed in the service sector, multireligious, of a lower socioeconomic background, and recipients of government assistance programs.

State law requires that cities keep communities of interest together to the extent practicable in a new district map. See Cal. Elec. Code § 21621(c)(2). As you are aware, the Federal and State 2020 Census data fails to accurately capture our community. This shortcoming in the data places a particular importance on our mapping workshops and our oral public and written testimony engagement in the public process, as it captures our communities more accurately where the Census does not.

Over the past year, Majdal Center and our partners have worked diligently to engage the Arab, Afghan, and Muslim communities in El Cajon in redistricting. Our organization participated in a very intentional, non-partisan, community-driven process to understand our shared priorities and discussed whether and why we should be kept together. We want to turn your attention back to:

- Our organization held 8 community education and mapping workshops on redistricting in English and Arabic.
- During this process, communities were also able to identify the social demographic characteristics, economic interests, and their shared policy priorities such as economic development, criminal justice, mental health services, healthcare, and housing.
- Over 100 community members attended public workshops to identify their communities of interest.

- We attended a total of 4 City Council meetings and 3 Public Redistricting Hearings.
- An additional 70 community members attended City of El Cajon Redistricting Hearings to tell you about the Arab community of interest in support of the submitted map.

**Through this engagement, we have learned that our Arab community members reside within two major blocs within the city of El Cajon outlined below:**

- (1) The first Arab community bloc in El Cajon can be defined by these boundaries: Greenfield Drive to the north, North Johnson Avenue to the west, Grape Street to the east, and East Lexington Avenue to the south.**
- (2) The second Arab community bloc we have identified can be defined by these boundaries: Main Street to the north, El Cajon Boulevard to the west, Jamacha Road to the east, and West/East Chase Avenue to the south.**

**A shapefile and pdf of our community map is attached to this letter for your reference while drafting the new district lines. The red points on the map represent physical locations of Arab community members, community organizations, and religious centers we collected through community mapping. This map was submitted for your records before the January 14th at 12pm deadline.**

According to [San Diego County's Refugee Arrival Data for FFY 2020-2021](#), over 1,500 refugees have resettled in San Diego in 2021 alone. El Cajon has historically resettled high numbers of refugees who rely on strong community networks for mutual aid and support. The Arab immigrant and refugee community in El Cajon experiences high rates of hidden homelessness, with families doubling up in the same home to afford rent. As a newcomer community, the majority speak a primary language other than English at home, and are limited English proficient. Our refugee and immigrant communities also have shared needs such as increased affordable housing, equitable transportation access, and English language services.

We ask that the city council and redistricting staff listen closely to the voices of the refugee and immigrant community in El Cajon, and their collective needs to ensure a fair and equitable mapping process. Thank you for your leading this important work for the residents of El Cajon. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Yasmeen Obeid, Redistricting Fellow, Majdal Center at [yasmeen@majdalcenter.org](mailto:yasmeen@majdalcenter.org).

Sincerely,



Ramah Awad  
Programs Manager  
Majdal Center  
327 E. Main Street, El Cajon CA 92020

Endorsed by:

Estela de Los Ríos  
Executive Director  
CSA San Diego  
327 Van Houten Ave, El Cajon CA 92020

Mumtaz Momand  
Vice President  
Afghan Community Culture Center  
140 W. Park Ave, El Cajon CA 92020

CC: City Manager Graham Mitchell  
City Attorney Morgan Foley, J.D  
City Clerk Angela Cortez, CMC