

## Communication from Public

**Name:** AAPI Equity Alliance

**Date Submitted:** 08/09/2023 11:28 AM

**Council File No:** 22-1196-S1

**Comments for Public Posting:** Attached is a public comment urging reforms to the Los Angeles City Charter and submitted by AAPI Equity Alliance, API Equality-LA, Asian American Drug Abuse Program, Center for Asian Americans United for Self Empowerment, Korean American Federation of Los Angeles, and Koreatown Youth & Community Center. Thank you for your consideration.



August 9, 2023

Los Angeles City Council  
Ad Hoc Committee on City Governance Reform  
200 North Spring Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: Council File #22-1196-S1

Dear Council President Krekorian and Councilmembers,

We are a group of community leaders and organizations serving many of the most vulnerable Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) in the City of Los Angeles. **We urge the Committee to help restore the confidence of our communities in local government by supporting reforms to the City Charter that would 1) increase the size of the City Council from 15 to 23-31 single-member districts and 2) create an independent redistricting commission.**

Angelenos are experiencing a crisis of faith in city government. AAPI communities, like others, have seen and heard of the scandals plaguing the Council, from criminal investigations of personal enrichment to leaked audio exposing the racism and gamesmanship of the last redistricting process. We do not feel adequately represented by our city government.<sup>i</sup> We do not feel that the Council takes enough action to respond to our needs, from affordable housing to safe neighborhoods.<sup>ii</sup> We are not engaged by candidates for elected office.<sup>iii</sup> These scandals, and the lack of representation, response, and engagement, unfold as our communities recover from the twin catastrophes of COVID-19 and the rise in anti-AAPI hate.

We urge you to support two significant reforms to the Charter that would strengthen the Council's ability to meaningfully represent AAPI communities and address our needs:

**1) Increase the size of the City Council from 15 to 23-31 single-member districts without dividing Asian communities of interest.** According to surveys conducted by Center for Asian Americans United for Self Empowerment (CAUSE), Organize Unite Reform (OUR) LA,<sup>iv</sup> and AAPI Equity Alliance, AAPI communities overwhelmingly support expanding the size of the Council.<sup>v</sup>

The current 15 single-member district Council does not adequately serve our communities. Initial modeling suggests that staying at 15 districts would make it almost impossible for AAPI voice to exceed 30% of any single district and more likely than not that the largest AAPI population in any given district would remain under 25%.

The same modeling suggests:

- At 23 districts, it becomes more possible for AAPI and Black communities to begin comprising 35% or higher of the population of districts. (Studies have shown that 35% is a threshold that strengthens the likelihood of a group becoming better represented.)
- Going beyond 31 districts could lead to the division of Koreatown, a significant Asian community of interest which, despite community desires to be united in one district, was only recently reunited during the last redistricting cycle.

This range may be subject to change, and not all numbers in the range may be equally desirable, as we continue to study the impact of different Council sizes on different communities. At this time we are not taking a position on multi-member or at-large districts because we do not have enough information to assess these options.

**2) Create an independent redistricting commission (IRC) that reflects, and meaningfully engages with, the diverse communities of the city, including AAPIs.**

AAPIs strongly support the creation of an IRC and believe it will lead to better representation of our communities.<sup>vi</sup> Critically, the IRC, as a public body managing a public process requiring public input, should be inclusive of and accessible to our community members. Asian Americans are the most likely to speak a language other than English at home, have the highest levels of language assistance needs, and experience the highest levels of linguistic isolation.<sup>vii</sup> Meaningful engagement of our communities means public education and outreach resources should be provided, and public meetings should be conducted, in multiple languages, such as Chinese, Korean, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Thai, Hindi, Khmer, Japanese, Samoan, and Tongan.

Thank you for your consideration. Please contact AAPI Equity Alliance (Candice Cho, Managing Director of Policy and Counsel, [ccho@aapiequity.org](mailto:ccho@aapiequity.org) and Hoang Nguyen, Director of External Affairs, [hnguyen@aapiequity.org](mailto:hnguyen@aapiequity.org)) if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Manjusha P. Kulkarni, Executive Director, AAPI Equity Alliance  
 Sonya Tianang, Executive Director, API Equality-LA  
 Dean Nakanishi, Chief Executive Officer, Asian American Drug Abuse Program, Inc.  
 Nancy Yap, Executive Director, Center for Asian Americans United for Self Empowerment  
 James An, President, Korean American Federation of Los Angeles  
 Johng Ho Song, Executive Director, Koreatown Youth & Community Center

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<sup>i</sup> When asked how well the Council reflects their identity, half of Asian respondents and more than a third of Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (NHPI) respondents said not at all or only a little. When asked how well the Council represents their interests, half of NHPI respondents and more than a third of Asian respondents said not at all or only a little. Catalyst California, Representation in LA City: An OUR LA Coalition Report (June 16, 2023), available at [https://www.catalystcalifornia.org/campaign-tools/maps-and-data/representation-in-la-city-an-our-la-coalition-report?utm\\_source=June+Newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=OUR+LA&emci=554888b0-6705-ee11-907c-00224832eb73&emdi=ea000000-0000-0000-0000-000000000001&ceid=](https://www.catalystcalifornia.org/campaign-tools/maps-and-data/representation-in-la-city-an-our-la-coalition-report?utm_source=June+Newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=OUR+LA&emci=554888b0-6705-ee11-907c-00224832eb73&emdi=ea000000-0000-0000-0000-000000000001&ceid=). “Less than half of APAs feel represented well in Los Angeles City Hall (46%), the lowest of any group by double

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digits.” CAUSE, Los Angeles Citywide Poll Reveals Multi-Ethnic Views of Racial Relations, Political Representation, and Quality of Life (December 21, 2022), available at <https://www.causeusa.org/news/2022/12/21/statewide-poll-reveals-multi-ethnic-views-of-racial-relations-political-representation-and-quality-of-life>.

<sup>ii</sup> When asked in the OUR LA survey how well the Council responds to your needs, a majority of Asian and NHPI respondents said not at all or only a little.

<sup>iii</sup> Despite high levels of enthusiasm for voting in 2022, few AAPI voters are reached out to by candidates, political parties, or their representatives, with majorities across Asian ethnic groups reporting that no one reached out to them to vote or register to vote. Pat Brown Institute for Public Affairs and California Community Foundation, #VoicesofLA AAPI Survey Results (March 15, 2022), available at <https://calstatela.patbrowninstitute.org/pbi-in-the-news/2022-voices-of-la-aapi-survey/>.

<sup>iv</sup> AAPI Equity Alliance is a partner of OUR LA, a multiracial, multi-generational, and multi-intersectional coalition of community-based organizations and racial justice advocates committed to community voice, multiracial solidarity, power-building, racial equity, structural reform, and transparency.

<sup>v</sup> In a December 2022 poll of registered voters, 67% of APA respondents favored increasing the size of the Council. CAUSE, California Community Poll: City of Los Angeles Toplines, available at <https://www.strategies360.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/22-545-CA-Community-Poll-12.22-LA-Toplines.pdf>. In the OUR LA survey conducted in March 2023, 63% of BIPOC respondents supported expanding the Council and 73% of Asians said increasing the number of Councilmembers would have a positive effect on how well the Council responds to their needs - the highest among all racial and ethnic groups - while 64% of NHPIs said the same. Finally, AAPI Equity Alliance, a coalition of more than 40 community-based organizations serving the 1.5 million AAPIs in Los Angeles County, polled its member organizations and 90% of respondents favored expansion.

<sup>vi</sup> In the OUR LA survey, 62% of BIPOC respondents supported creating an IRC, and Asian respondents had the highest rate of reporting that an IRC would positively affect how well the Council responds to their needs (73%), with a majority of NHPIs saying the same (60%). In AAPI Equity Alliance’s survey, 100% of respondents favored an IRC.

<sup>vii</sup> AAPI Data, State of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders in the United States (2022), available at <https://aapidata.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/State-AANHPIs-National-June2022.pdf>.

## Communication from Public

**Name:** Fair Rep LA Coalition  
**Date Submitted:** 08/09/2023 01:02 PM  
**Council File No:** 22-1196-S1  
**Comments for Public Posting:** Fair Rep LA Coalition Memo attached

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INDEPENDENT REDISTRICTING AND LOS ANGELES CITY COUNCIL SIZE

PRESENTED BY  
**THE FAIR REP LA COALITION**

AUGUST 2023



California



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS  
OF GREATER LOS ANGELES



CITIZENS  
TAKE  
ACTION



To: LA City Council Governance Reform Committee  
From: Fair Rep LA  
Date: August 9th, 2023  
Re: Charter Reform - CF 22-1196-S1

## **Fair Rep LA August 10th Recommendations for Independent Redistricting and Council Size**

### *BACKGROUND*

Fair Rep LA was born out of our efforts in the 2021 redistricting cycle, and we have been organizing around these two charter reforms since then.<sup>1</sup> Many in our coalition were involved in the 2020 call for a more independent redistricting process,<sup>2</sup> which resulted in the only reforms to our city's redistricting process over the last 24 years.<sup>3</sup>

We appreciate the time and consideration the committee has put into advancing this conversation, and offer a number of recommendations. Input on these recommendations was not limited to organizations that are formally a part of Fair Rep LA.<sup>4</sup> Fair Rep LA participants include organizations who are both formally and informally involved in the coalition's ongoing organizing, as well as activists and members of Neighborhood Councils participating in an individual capacity.

All recommendations were required to receive at least 2/3rds support from individuals participating in Fair Rep LA's ongoing organizing. All but one of the recommendations presented here received over 87% support.<sup>5</sup>

Note – these recommendations do not necessarily reflect the positions or preferences of individual organizations participating in Fair Rep LA. They are arrived at in the spirit of identifying consensus and finding compromise. The recommendations are not intended to represent a comprehensive proposal, but to provide direction on significant issues that have emerged during the last 9 months of committee discussions.

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<sup>1</sup> October 2021 letter to the 2021 LACCRC in support of IRC & Council Expansion:

[https://clkrep.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2021/21-1472\\_PC\\_PM\\_09-20-2022.pdf](https://clkrep.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2021/21-1472_PC_PM_09-20-2022.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> 2020 Coalition Letter to LA City Council:

[https://ens.lacity.org/cla/agendamaterial/claagendamaterial3222146058\\_11192020.pdf](https://ens.lacity.org/cla/agendamaterial/claagendamaterial3222146058_11192020.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Amending Motion:

[https://clkrep.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2020/20-0668\\_misc\\_amend\\_martinez\\_8-11-2020.pdf](https://clkrep.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2020/20-0668_misc_amend_martinez_8-11-2020.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Current members of Fair Rep LA: Abundant Housing LA, California Common Cause, CalRCV, Citizens Take Action, Ground Game LA, LA Forward, League of Women Voters of Greater Los Angeles, Los Angeles for All, Los Angeles for Democracy Vouchers, Mar Vista Voice, Represent Us, & Unrig LA

<sup>5</sup> A previous version of recommendation 10 received 73% support in our final vote, and was subsequently revised to reflect input received.

## *AD HOC GOVERNANCE REFORM COMMITTEE*

**1. The Ad Hoc Gov Reform Committee needs to offer a remote public comment option for all future meetings.**

Remote public comment allows enhanced input from those not able to make it to City Hall. Failure to include it disenfranchises the immunocompromised, those who live far from Downtown LA, are limited to mass transportation, or who cannot take time away from work, school, or arrange childcare. This committee should be seeking to expand the spectrum of voices weighing in on charter reforms, not limiting them.

**2. The Ad Hoc Gov Reform Committee must take immediate steps to ensure City Council is prepared to vote this November to submit appropriate ethics charter reforms for voter consideration on the March 2024 ballot.**

Ethics charter reforms are essential to *truly* addressing the challenges we face as a city. They would greatly strengthen the independence and efficiency of the Independent Redistricting Commission (IRC) formation process. Ethics Commissioners could be entrusted with increased responsibility in the process of ranking IRC applicants. Just as important, ethics charter reforms would provide an immediate and significant change in response to recent city scandals, not one that would take years to implement. Lastly, voters will be reluctant to embrace council expansion without seeing greater accountability across City Hall. Enhancing the independence and power of the Ethics Commission will both directly and indirectly strengthen the viability of many of the other charter reform measures we might be sending to the ballot in 2024.

Last summer, in an effort to spur the conversation on relevant charter reforms, the Ethics Commission compiled a brief list of recommendations. These were not transmitted to the Council, and do not represent the type of detailed policy proposal they would typically provide the Council. Last fall, after the release of the leaked recordings, these recommendations were included in a council motion<sup>6</sup> but have not received any activity since then.

These recommendations need work and attention. While they go a long way towards increasing the power of the Ethics Commission, they *do not* sufficiently ensure the Ethics Commission's independence.<sup>7</sup> We ask this committee to either begin the process of refining the proposals, or request the Ethics Commission report back with updated recommendations.

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<sup>6</sup> Council File 22-1232:

<https://cityclerk.lacity.org/lacityclerkconnect/index.cfm?fa=ccfi.viewrecord&cfnumber=22-1232>

<sup>7</sup> Potential changes to that proposal include, but are not limited to: increasing the size of the commission to 7 members instead of 5, providing increased conflict of interest screenings for commissioners, and ensuring that a majority of the commissioners are appointed by the commission itself via open application instead of all of them being directly appointed by elected officials.

## COUNCIL SIZE & IMPLEMENTATION

**3. Fair Rep LA is still researching and discussing further recommendations for council size, but believes that the council should be expanded to at least 23 council districts.**

Council expansion must be sufficient in size in order to achieve the baseline objectives of the reform. The reduction in average council district by approximately 100k residents would be appreciable from the perspective of both running a competitive election,<sup>8</sup> as well as representing and managing a district. More importantly, it addresses the inherent complications we face with redistricting in a large and expansive city with extremely unusual boundaries.

Nowhere is this more true than in Council District 15, where San Pedro and Wilmington are connected to Watts via the narrow connection of the Harbor Gateway. Our last commission wanted to address calls to relocate Watts into another district, but backtracked once they realized they would be forced to “pick winners and losers” and choose some other neighboring community to take their place in Council District 15.<sup>9</sup> While we can address this *somewhat* cleanly with 21 districts, it still leaves the northern parts of the Harbor Gateway far from the district core, and it’s possible that the southernmost district would later have to creep north again if it does not keep pace with the rest of the city’s population growth.

**4. A change in council size must be implemented in time for the 2026 elections. The question of council size should be placed on the November 2024 ballot in a manner in which a sufficiently thorough redistricting process can occur in advance of the 2026 elections.**

Our current district lines were drawn with the intent to disenfranchise numerous communities across the city. Current districts are too large for *anyone* to reasonably manage. We cannot be forced to wait nine years to finally see a fair and representative government in the City of LA. The Chief Legislative Officer (CLA) has indicated that if we were to place the question of council size on the November 2024 ballot with the intention of implementing new lines in time for the 2026 elections, that could result in a strained redistricting timeline. To ensure sufficient time for a meaningful redistricting process – including outreach, commission formation, and deliberation – the committee should consider measures that would offer more space for that process. This could be achieved by adopting Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) and eliminating primaries and/or by placing the redistricting measure on the March 2024 ballot to allow for the commission formation process to begin early.

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<sup>8</sup> The law can only go so far in addressing corruption. Our system of government relies upon competitive elections where a corrupt or unresponsive elected official can be voted out of office.

<sup>9</sup> As a candidate, Councilmember McOsler pointed to Watts’ 2021 redistricting experience as convincing him of the need to increase the number of Council Districts.

**5. The Ad Hoc Gov Reform Committee must request an immediate report back on the implementation of Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) as a potential component of the reforms being considered.**

Some of the alternative representation models that have been proposed, like utilizing a small number of at-large representatives or multi-member districts, would best be combined with RCV to steer clear of potential California Voting Rights Act (CVRA) concerns. RCV also has the potential to empower grassroots and BIPOC candidates regardless of whether the city retains single-member districts or implements an alternate model. By using RCV and eliminating primaries, the city could save a significant amount of money that is spent on paying the county to administer the elections, allowing for money devoted to the public matching funds program to go further, and ensuring all races are decided by a larger and more representative electorate in November. Under our regular election cycle, candidates who win outright in the primary face an extended gap of 5-8 months between their victory and when they take office. Eliminating primaries would offer a cleaner transition in power.

While adopting RCV and eliminating primaries would offer significant savings in the long-term, there would be some added upfront costs. The city would need to make a sizable commitment to a public outreach and education campaign. Earlier this year the county registrar provided a report on this subject to the City of Burbank.<sup>10</sup> The registrar confirmed they could administer an RCV election, but it would require extended work between the city and county to implement. The county would need clarity that the city was adopting RCV and would have to take steps to upgrade their current systems, which would present added short-term costs.

**6. The Ad Hoc Gov Reform Committee must request an immediate report back on hybrid at-large & multi-member district designs & conditions under which they would be acceptable for the City of Los Angeles.**

Both of these models offer varying approaches to reducing the deference currently afforded to individual councilmembers over issues in their district. They also step outside of the zero-sum dynamics of representation that come with single member districts. We do not have a preference for any particular model of representation, but believe this Committee should take the time to evaluate its full range of options before moving any proposal forward.

Consideration of additional factors would be important with either model given potential concerns regarding compliance with the CVRA. Utilizing RCV would be extremely important for either model's success in LA. Additionally, if a hybrid at-large model were used, it is important that there be an appropriate number of at-large seats<sup>11</sup> – all of those seats would need to be open for election in the same contest, and the amount of public financing available for these citywide council candidates would need to be substantially increased.

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<sup>10</sup> Burbank City Clerk - Ranked Choice Voting Information & Update Regarding Status In Los Angeles County:

[https://burbank.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view\\_id=42&clip\\_id=10168&meta\\_id=414314](https://burbank.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view_id=42&clip_id=10168&meta_id=414314)

<sup>11</sup> Having too few at-large seats would limit these offices to only the most elite candidates and likely fail to represent the diversity of this city. Having too many at-large seats, in proportion to the total membership of council, would diminish the power and voice of the members elected by district.

7. **In the 30 days following the IRC’s submission of final maps, City Council candidates (w/ existing accounts for that year’s campaign cycle) drawn out of the district they were running to represent will have a one time opportunity to transfer/redesignate campaign funds to an account for the council district in which they reside (if that district is scheduled to be on the ballot at the same time).**

Redistricting can involve dramatic changes to representation at the least opportune time, just before candidates are set to qualify for the ballot. This will inevitably be the case if we increase the size of our council. The City of LA’s strict fundraising windows and campaign finance regulations pose a unique challenge for a candidate drawn out of the district race they were fundraising for. A council candidate drawn out of their district cannot simply transfer their funds to a new account. They would be faced with two options. They could move, or they could return all of the contributions previously received and ask supporters to donate to their new account (at the same time the campaign is attempting to juggle our onerous ballot qualification process).

While this dynamic is complicated for any candidate to wade through, it impacts grassroots candidates much more severely. Finding a new place of residence at the drop of a hat in LA is not easy. A well resourced establishment candidate might own other properties across the city, and would have no shortage of acquaintances in the real estate industry eager to help them find a new residence. Returning contributions and asking donors to give to a new account would be an administrative nightmare for anyone going down that route, but a well resourced campaign would have a much easier time handling that process.

8. **Council expansion should not come at the expense of staffing levels. A slight reduction might be warranted, but only if council expansion reached the range of 25+ districts.**

This measure must be able to deliver on its promises. Reducing the budgets of council offices in proportion to a change in council size would ultimately not result in the enhanced constituent services we hope to see by right-sizing our districts.

The Committee must engage in a broader conversation about how resources are distributed across the council districts, and how it could be done in a way that results in a more equitable delivery of services. City Council has made some attempts to use a more equitable approach to distributing funds with a prioritization of districts with the greatest need, including part of its COVID response efforts. During that discussion,<sup>12</sup> a few councilmembers noted their frustration that the approach was unworkable with our large and expansive districts.

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<sup>12</sup> August 26th 2020 LA City Council Meeting (Item #25):  
[https://lacity.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view\\_id=129&clip\\_id=20176](https://lacity.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=129&clip_id=20176)  
Council File 20-0683:  
<https://cityclerk.lacity.org/lacityclerkconnect/index.cfm?fa=ccfi.viewrecord&cfnumber=20-0683>

## INDEPENDENT REDISTRICTING COMMISSION FORMATION PROCESS

- 9. The IRC formation process should be administered by the City Clerk, at the direction of the LA City Ethics Commission. All major decisions should require a vote of the Ethics Commission.**

Independence and transparency must be upheld throughout the commission formation process. No single person should have decision making authority. The Ethics Commissioners should be responsible for approving all major decisions at an open meeting, including but not limited to: approval of applications, creation of pooling regions, outreach plans, determining deadlines for application submission, selection of screening panelists, and any significant contracting.

The Ethics Commission has a relatively small staff, wide ranging responsibilities, and an extremely limited budget. We do not believe it would be wise to divert their staff's time and resources to the administration of the commission formation process. Even if the commission were front funded a sum of money for this work, contracting this out could be costly, and directly hiring staff could be very time consuming and inefficient. The City Clerk's office has the staff and resources necessary to do outreach, distribute/receive applications, translate documents, and carry out the initial screening of applicants based on objective qualification requirements.

- 10. The Committee had extended discussion of whether or not candidates should be ranked to pool together the most qualified applicants like most CA jurisdictions do, or to use a less subjective approach. The Committee should request a report back on IRC models like the State of Michigan's which uses a demographically weighted lottery system to empanel a commission.**

We *do not* recommend embracing the State of Michigan's specific IRC model, but there are some aspects of its system that are worth studying. If used in combination with a basic level of subjective screening, they might produce a more representative commission.

- 11. If a CA style screening process is utilized in which commission applicants are ranked via subjective criteria, a screening panel must be utilized. Assuming charter reforms related to the Ethics Commission's independence are passed and implemented, the Ethics Commission could serve as the screening panel, otherwise Ethics should solicit applications for and select an independent screening panel.**

In 2018, Long Beach voters were presented with multiple charter reform measures, one related to creating an IRC and another related to creating an ethics commission. The IRC measure provided that if the ethics measure passed, the ethics commission would serve as the screening panel.<sup>13</sup> However, if that ethics measure failed, a 3-member screening panel would have to be formed. A similar approach should be utilized for the City of LA. If the size and

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<sup>13</sup> Long Beach Charter Sec. 2505 (f):  
[https://library.municode.com/ca/long\\_beach/codes/city\\_charter?nodetid=CH\\_ARTXXVCODIRE\\_S2505COSERE](https://library.municode.com/ca/long_beach/codes/city_charter?nodetid=CH_ARTXXVCODIRE_S2505COSERE)

independence of the ethics commission is expanded in 2024, it should handle the IRC screening process, otherwise a screening panel must be assembled.

**12. The City's 7 Area Planning Commissions should not be used as a basis for geographically pooling IRC applicants.**

As the first part of a two step process, many local jurisdictions pool applicants by region, and randomly select one candidate from each region. This offers a level of geographical balance to the commissioners who will select from the remaining applicants to fill out the commission.

Some have proposed utilizing the city's 7 Area Planning Commissions for pooling purposes. These planning areas vary greatly in population, with a deviation over 100%.<sup>14</sup> The smallest planning area is smaller in population than a single Council District, with a population of just under 200k, while the three largest planning areas have populations spanning 714k-771k. South LA's planning area has a population greater than the two coastal planning areas combined, yet the latter would receive twice as many commissioners in the initial lottery draw of commissioners. The Valley is also severely underrepresented. Even though The Valley boasts nearly 40% of the city's population, it only has two planning areas and would be represented by less than 30% of the initial lottery draw of commissioners. These planning areas fail to give us a rough geographic balance in the first set of commissioners, which in some ways defeats the purpose of such geographic pooling.

The size of the IRC will, in part, dictate how many pooling regions might be appropriate, and given the lack of consensus on that matter we do not have a specific alternative proposal for pooling regions.

**13. The Ad Hoc Gov Reform Committee must request an immediate report back on options for allowing non-citizens to be eligible to serve on the commission.**

Options could potentially include allowing non-citizens to apply to serve on the IRC if they have resided in the City of LA for a minimum period of time.<sup>15</sup>

**14. The IRC should have 2 non-voting alternates.**

We do not have a position as to whether the non-voting alternates should be allowed to speak at meetings. That would, in part, depend upon the total number of voting commissioners.

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<sup>14</sup> A rough breakdown of the populations, population deviations, and Voting Age Population demographics for each Regional Planning Area can be found here:

<https://www.fairrepla.com/post/7apcs>

<sup>15</sup> While the change did not impact the State IRC, which requires commissioners to be registered voters, CA law was changed in 2019 to allow non-citizens over the age of 18 to serve on state boards and commissions:

<https://www.gov.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/SB-225-Signing-Message-2019.pdf>

## *INDEPENDENT REDISTRICTING COMMISSION STRUCTURE & RULES*

### **15. The IRC must have a comprehensive ex parte communications ban.**

The Committee has discussed an ex parte communications ban that only applies to commissioners and elected officials, as well as their respective government staff. This is extremely narrow in scope and would be easily circumvented. Elected officials have campaign staff, supporters, and allied organizations that could be used as proxies to circumvent the ban. The IRC must be subject to a complete ex parte communications ban, like the State of CA's which prohibits the IRC from having ex parte communications with anyone.<sup>16</sup> This ban must extend beyond the commissioners and include commission staff, contractors, and anyone from the Ethics Commission or City Clerk's office involved in the commission formation process.

### **16. A minimum protected budget must be established, and be tied to inflation in a manner similar to the State of CA's IRC.**

The State of CA's method<sup>17</sup> for providing its IRC with a protected budget offers a degree of flexibility. If the commission receives a budget in excess of the minimum (tied to inflation), that higher budget becomes the new floor (also tied to inflation).

### **17. In order to ensure that Angelenos of all backgrounds are able to serve on the IRC, it is important commissioners receive meaningful compensation for their time and service. The Ad Hoc Gov Reform Committee has discussed stipends ranging from \$25-100, which is far short of the \$300 per meeting stipend provided by the CA IRC. The latter, \$300 per meeting, should be viewed as the floor for consideration, and we encourage the committee to explore options closer to providing a living wage.**

Serving on an IRC isn't a light task. Communities are on the table, and that can create a highly contentious environment. Service requires a sacrifice of time away from work, friends, and family, especially during the height of redistricting. We must look towards exceeding the \$300 per meeting stipend offered by the State of CA and consider a wider range of options for compensation models.

### **18. Require that the IRC be represented by outside counsel.**

The IRC must be able to access and rely upon independent legal advice. The LA City Attorney is an elected official, and it is primarily responsive to serving the legal interests of our council and mayor.

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<sup>16</sup> CA Government Code Chapter 3.2 - Section 8253(a)(3): Commission members and staff may not communicate with or receive communications about redistricting matters from anyone outside of a public hearing. This paragraph does not prohibit communication between commission members, staff, legal counsel, and consultants retained by the commission that is otherwise permitted by the Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act or its successor outside of a public hearing.

[https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes\\_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=GOV&sectionNum=8253](https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=GOV&sectionNum=8253)

<sup>17</sup> CA Government Code Chapter 3.2 - Section 8253.6

[https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes\\_displaySection.xhtml?sectionNum=8253.6.&nodeTreePath=3.1.10&lawCode=GOV](https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?sectionNum=8253.6.&nodeTreePath=3.1.10&lawCode=GOV)

**19. The IRC must be required to provide a minimum of 14 days notice for all IRC meetings, with the exception of meetings scheduled within the last 28 days prior to final map adoption deadline, at which point somewhere between 3-5 days notice should be required.**

Members of the public and community organizations need to have sufficient notice of IRC meetings in order to plan their schedules, organize turnout, develop meaningful comment, and allow the commissioners time to read their written comment in advance of the meeting. 14 days notice is the standard used by the State of CA's IRC. We do not have a specific recommendation for the final 28 days of the redistricting process, but believe somewhere between 3-5 days notice would be reasonable.

**20. The IRC must be required to schedule at least 1/2 of their meetings on the evening or weekend.**

In order to maximize the potential engagement of Angelenos in the redistricting process, the IRC must be required to have meetings in the evening or on the weekends. The current legal standard is that a minimum of only one of the four required meetings must be held on an evening or a weekend.<sup>18</sup>

**21. The IRC must be required to offer a remote public comment option for all IRC meetings.**

All of the 2021 LA City Council Redistricting Commission's meetings were conducted via Zoom, engaging diverse public comment with over 6,300 individuals attending public hearings and more than 1,450 providing testimony.<sup>19</sup>

Redistricting Commission meetings are often extremely lengthy, and during the peak of redistricting can easily exceed an average of 5-10 hours. Remote public comment allows people to participate who would not have been able to devote that same time if they had been required to attend in person.

**22. Live interpretation services must be provided to the public upon request received at least 48 hours in advance of the meeting.**

Live interpretation services should be provided in Spanish for every IRC meeting,<sup>20</sup> and live interpretation services should be provided in all other languages if requested at least 48 hours in advance.

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<sup>18</sup> Note that, in response to requests from Fair Rep LA members, the 2021 LACCRC made the early decision to hold its meetings in the evening or on the weekend and continued that practice for the rest of the year.

<sup>19</sup> Pg 5 of the 2021 LA City Council Redistricting Commission Report:  
[https://clkrep.lacity.org/online/docs/2020/20-0668-S7\\_misc\\_10-29-21.pdf](https://clkrep.lacity.org/online/docs/2020/20-0668-S7_misc_10-29-21.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> The IRC could potentially be required to establish a minimum number of languages which are provided at all meetings.

**23. Require the commission to make best efforts to publish all documents produced for the public in all languages required by the Voting Rights Act for elections.**

This list of languages in Los Angeles currently includes: English, Spanish, Armenian, Chinese, Persian (Farsi), Hindi, Japanese, Khmer, Korean, Russian, Tagalog, Thai, and Vietnamese.

**24. Elected officials must not have preferential access at IRC comment via guaranteed nor additional time to speak, but are welcome to present public comment on the record.**

The Ad Hoc Gov Reform Committee has discussed allowing Councilmembers priority in speaking order, and extended time to speak at comment. This kind of preferential access would deeply undermine the integrity of the IRC.

The charter should make clear that Councilmembers are encouraged to provide public comment at IRC meetings, but they are not to be given additional accommodations over members of the general public.

**25. The IRC must be prohibited from considering district cores and incumbency protections.**

The interests of incumbents, candidates, and political parties should not be considered when drawing the lines. Furthermore, district cores should not be considered, as they can serve as a proxy for reinforcing incumbency protections.

**26. The IRC must be required to pass vital decisions, such as the approval of draft or final maps, via a super majority.**

Requiring a supermajority for major decisions ensures the commission is working from a perspective of collaboration and consensus building, instead of serving a narrow agenda.

### *CITY STRUCTURE*

**27. A City Data Bureau could play an important role in redistricting and the ongoing activities of City Hall. However, this idea should only be pursued if the Bureau is given a sufficient budget, clear mandate, and structured in an independent manner.**

Up until now the CLA's office has, through its contracted demographer, played a significant role in supporting the LA City Council Redistricting Commission's (LACCRC) formation process, liaising with whatever demographer the LACCRC eventually contracts with, and assisting the council during finalization of maps. This is a less than ideal setup given the CLA's office is primarily responsive to the Council. However, changing that dynamic might not require creating a new department. A City Data Bureau needs to be fully thought through so that we can ensure the integrity of the data it produces, provide the department with a clear mandate for what its ongoing work will entail, and potentially structure the department in a manner similar to the Ethics Commission.

**28. The Committee should not consider reducing the threshold for overriding a Mayor's veto.**

Our charter currently requires a 2/3rds vote of the Council to override a Mayor's veto. The CLA's report suggests the Council may want to consider reducing this threshold to as low as a simple majority. Part of the rationale behind council expansion is the hope the Mayor will be encouraged to provide a greater check on the Council President.<sup>21</sup> Reducing this threshold undermines this effort, and would diminish the natural checks and balances contained in our charter in a reckless manner.

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*STATEMENT FOR AN EQUITABLE FUTURE*

While there is no silver bullet nor perfect representational model for Los Angeles to use in crafting our charter reform, Fair Rep LA recognizes the inequities, the loopholes for corruption, and the centralization of power inherent within our current city government. The reforms discussed here are aimed to address these local concerns: Ethics reform will strengthen the Ethics Commission, empowering them as an independent check on the City's officials; the formation of an Independent Redistricting Commission will address Council's current control over the redistricting process; expanding City Council will reduce the number of Angelenos represented by each Councilmember from a mind-numbing 265,000 to a responsive ratio closer to that of other large US cities.

None of these reforms on their own, however, will equitably address the representational needs of Los Angeles nor rebuild our public trust – currently in disrepair following years of corruption and scandals. The residents of Los Angeles deserve robust consideration of the following policies:

- *Periodic Charter Reform* to ensure regular scheduled public discussion of our City Charter and a more independent process for reforming it.
- *Democracy Vouchers* or other forms of public financing that reduce the influence of special interests & wealth in elections.
- *Indigenous Representation* that provides a voice to historically marginalized local communities and tribal governments.
- *Technology Leveraged for Equitable Public Participation*, including: language justice, video with toll free phone access, investment in engaging historically excluded populations, universal remote public comment access, and the prompt posting of Community Impact Statements, meeting recordings, and public comments as open data.

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<sup>21</sup> This assessment is based in part upon the council sizes members have discussed in meetings and in the public record. *None* of these exceed doubling the council. If the conversation on council size were to grow to considering an expansion in the range of 35+ council members, there might be *some* argument for making an adjustment to the threshold.

## Communication from Public

**Name:** Sofia G. Quiñones

**Date Submitted:** 08/09/2023 11:13 AM

**Council File No:** 22-1196-S1

**Comments for Public Posting:** City of Los Angeles On behalf of our ancestors and the generations before us who fought for the 1965 Voting Rights Act (52 U.S.C. Sec. 10301 et seq.) and the California Voting Right Act of 2001, California Election Codes § 14026 and 114026, <https://casetext.com/statute/california-codes/california-elections-code/division-14-election-day-procedures/chapter-15-rights-of-voters/section-14026-definitions> We call upon the public at large and all are elected officials to reject and condemn the racist concept of At Large Elections for the City of Los Angeles. The history of At Large Elections is rooted in colonialism, a eurocentric ideology and fascist practice of economic exploitation. The most disenfranchised communities in the City of Los Angeles are those that are segregated and redlined. Native American/Aboriginal, Mexican Americans, and African Americans have a distinct shared history in Los Angeles. These specifically harmed groups experienced genocide, slavery, chattel slavery, Jim/Juan Crow and other discriminatory factors which leads us to today's systemic political disenfranchisement. The simple facts are that peoples that are poor and disenfranchised are suffering the most especially, due to inflation, the cost of living expenses, and due to the toxic and unhealthy environmental areas they live in. These specific historically harmed groups who have residents that have time to engage politically are already stretched thin with their own community meetings. To force already marginalized groups to take on more responsibility and divide their time to now run another candidate in an At Large Election that they financially can not afford to do is unacceptable. Although campaign financing assists marginalized communities it can't prevent the rich and powerful from outspending candidates with less financial resources. Nor does it do anything to improve the racial wealth gap in these segregated communities. We recognize that educational institutions have had a long history of systemic racism and that individuals within academia have enabled and perpetuated political disenfranchisement by supporting At Large Elections. Academicians have a long history of creating the plans for urban renewal/gentrification and they are currently actively engaged with projects that have led to the occupation and displacement of peoples, businesses, cultural, and sacred spaces. We reject the notion that At Large Elections will assist in electing more women from disenfranchised segregated communities to political office in the City of Los Angeles. We also want to point out that diversity does not equate to proportional representation for those groups most historically harmed but the City of Los Angeles. <https://youtu.be/KZ9zvyiPJTY> Por Mi Raza Habla Mi Espiritu! Sofia G. Quinones East Los Angeles Boyle Heights Coalition (323)494-6005

## Communication from Public

**Name:** John Kerr

**Date Submitted:** 08/09/2023 04:54 PM

**Council File No:** 22-1196-S1

**Comments for Public Posting:** After the revelations from the "Fed Tapes," its clear at Los Angeles has a political representation problem. Its a problem that gnaws at the very foundation of our democratic values, and continues to disenfranchise Angelenos by concentrating power in the hands of so few people. We heard of the tapes blatant machinations to deny renters and Black citizens equal political power through a divide and conquer redistricting strategy, while also punishing political enemies of the Council President. Therefore, I do applaud the ad hoc committee of government reform for seriously looking at independent redistricting (IRC). However, independent redistricting alone will not deliver the fair and equitable representation LA needs. The Committee must seriously look at ethics reforms, council expansion, and moving to ranked-choice voting to ensure our local government is responsive to its citizens. First, the committee must offer remote pubic comment for all future meetings and schedule meetings after working hours. Too many Angelenos are unable to get to City Hall on a weekday due to work, childcare and school commitments. We must expand the spectrum of voices weighing in on charter reform, not limit them. Second, ethics reforms are essential to restoring the public's trust and would ensure the success of the IRC and council expansion. The committee should begin the process of refining the proposals of the Ethics Commission and ensure that City Council is prepared to vote this November to submit appropriate ethics charter reforms for voter consideration in 2024. Third, 1 person cannot adequately represent 265,000 people! That is more people that the whole of the City of Long Beach, our County's 2nd-biggest city (and they have 9 councilmembers). Our ratio of councilmembers to population is the worst in the nation. In my district, my neighborhood is combined with Downtown LA and Boyle Heights instead of the rest of my neighborhood and my immediate area. These two neighborhoods have drastically different needs and, with the zoned capacity of DTLA increased, over the next ten years its possible we will all lose out to downtown interests. Outside my district, Watts remains stuck due to geography and our small number of districts in district where there needs are overlooked. Even with independent redistricting, 15 "puzzle pieces" is too few, and cannot represent our vast and diverse city.

Benefits of expansion mean councilmembers will have a smaller constituency and thus each Angeleno will have closer access to their representative. More seats at City Council mean more robust debate and a diversity of voices, ending a period of too many unanimous, rubber stamp voting we've seen in recent years. Smaller districts mean that city councilmembers will be more easily held accountable by their voters and smaller districts mean the cost of running for office will be lower, allowing more diverse candidates to run. Our council should double in size to at least 31 members, and the committee should also order the study of at-large and multi-member districts to get a full picture of possible outcomes that would work for Los Angeles. These changes must be implemented in time for the 2026 elections and the council size question should be placed on the November 2024 ballot. In order to get to get there, LA also needs a better voting system. I implore the committee to order a report on Ranked Choice Voting (RCV). Across the nation, for our most populous city to our largest state, ranked choice voting is making elections fairer, more competitive, and less costly in the long term. In our current system, candidates who win out right in the primaries must wait 5-8 months before being sworn-in. That gap was painfully felt for residents of CD14 after the arrest of Jose Huizar or CD1 after the election of Eunisses Hernandez and the subsequent Fed Tapes leak revealing Gil Cedillo's corruption. RCV would eliminate separate primaries and allow citizen's the express their opinion on all the candidates running, resulting in more consensus-backed winners (for example, look at Alaska, which under a non-RCV system may have sent Sarah Palin back to Washington, but thanks to RCV, the full breadth of that states political diversity was able to have their say and sent a more reasonable rep to DC).

## Communication from Public

**Name:** AAPI Equity Alliance  
**Date Submitted:** 08/09/2023 09:14 PM  
**Council File No:** 22-1196-S1  
**Comments for Public Posting:** Attached is an updated letter urging reforms to the LA City Charter that reflects additional AAPI community groups as signatories.



August 10, 2023 (UPDATED)

Los Angeles City Council  
Ad Hoc Committee on City Governance Reform  
200 North Spring Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: Council File #22-1196-S1

Dear Council President Krekorian and Councilmembers,

We are a group of community leaders and organizations serving many of the most vulnerable Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) in the City of Los Angeles. **We urge the Committee to help restore the confidence of our communities in local government by supporting reforms to the City Charter that would 1) increase the size of the City Council from 15 to 23-31 single-member districts and 2) create an independent redistricting commission.**

Angelenos are experiencing a crisis of faith in city government. AAPI communities, like others, have seen and heard of the scandals plaguing the Council, from criminal investigations of personal enrichment to leaked audio exposing the racism and gamesmanship of the last redistricting process. We do not feel adequately represented by our city government.<sup>1</sup> We do not feel that the Council takes enough action to respond to our needs, from affordable housing to safe neighborhoods.<sup>2</sup> We are not engaged by candidates for elected office.<sup>3</sup> These scandals, and the lack of representation, response, and engagement, unfold as our communities recover from the twin catastrophes of COVID-19 and the rise in anti-AAPI hate.

We urge you to support two significant reforms to the Charter that would strengthen the Council's ability to meaningfully represent AAPI communities and address our needs:

**1) Increase the size of the City Council from 15 to 23-31 single-member districts without dividing Asian communities of interest.** According to surveys conducted by Center for Asian Americans United for Self Empowerment (CAUSE), Organize Unite Reform (OUR) LA,<sup>4</sup> and AAPI Equity Alliance, AAPI communities overwhelmingly support expanding the size of the Council.<sup>5</sup>

The current 15 single-member district Council does not adequately serve our communities. Initial modeling suggests that staying at 15 districts would make it almost impossible for AAPI voice to exceed 30% of any single district and more likely than not that the largest AAPI population in any given district would remain under 25%.

The same modeling suggests:

- At 23 districts, it becomes more possible for AAPI and Black communities to begin comprising 35% or higher of the population of districts. (Studies have shown that 35% is a threshold that strengthens the likelihood of a group becoming better represented.)
- Going beyond 31 districts could lead to the division of Koreatown, a significant Asian community of interest which, despite community desires to be united in one district, was only recently reunited during the last redistricting cycle.

This range may be subject to change, and not all numbers in the range may be equally desirable, as we continue to study the impact of different Council sizes on different communities. At this time we are not taking a position on multi-member or at-large districts because we do not have enough information to assess these options.

**2) Create an independent redistricting commission (IRC) that reflects, and meaningfully engages with, the diverse communities of the city, including AAPIs.** AAPIs strongly support the creation of an IRC and believe it will lead to better representation of our communities.<sup>6</sup> Critically, the IRC, as a public body managing a public process requiring public input, should be inclusive of and accessible to our community members. Asian Americans are the most likely to speak a language other than English at home, have the highest levels of language assistance needs, and experience the highest levels of linguistic isolation.<sup>7</sup> Meaningful engagement of our communities means public education and outreach resources should be provided, and public meetings should be conducted, in multiple languages, such as Chinese, Korean, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Thai, Hindi, Khmer, Japanese, Samoan, and Tongan.

Thank you for your consideration. Please contact AAPI Equity Alliance (Candice Cho, Managing Director of Policy and Counsel, [ccho@aapiequity.org](mailto:ccho@aapiequity.org) and Hoang Nguyen, Director of External Affairs, [hnguyen@aapiequity.org](mailto:hnguyen@aapiequity.org)) if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Manjusha P. Kulkarni, Executive Director, AAPI Equity Alliance  
 Sonya Tianang, Executive Director, API Equality-LA  
 Dean Nakanishi, Chief Executive Officer, Asian American Drug Abuse Program, Inc.  
 Connie Chung Joe, Chief Executive Officer, Asian Americans Advancing Justice Southern California (AJSOCAL)  
 Nancy Yap, Executive Director, Center for Asian Americans United for Self Empowerment  
 Hyepin Im, President/CEO, Faith and Community Empowerment  
 Eunice Hur Song, Executive Director, Korean American Coalition - Los Angeles  
 James An, President, Korean American Federation of Los Angeles  
 Johng Ho Song, Executive Director, Koreatown Youth & Community Center  
 Erich Nakano, Executive Director, Little Tokyo Service Center  
 Hina Ahmad, Deputy Director, South Asian Network  
 Chanchanit Martorell, Executive Director, Thai Community Development Center

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<sup>1</sup> When asked how well the Council reflects their identity, half of Asian respondents and more than a third of Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (NHPI) respondents said not at all or only a little. When asked how well the Council represents their interests, half of NHPI respondents and more than a third of Asian respondents said not at all or only a little. Catalyst California, Representation in LA City: An OUR LA Coalition Report (June 16, 2023), available at <https://www.catalystcalifornia.org/campaign-tools/maps-and-data/representation-in-la-city-an-our-la-coalition->

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[report?utm\\_source=June+Newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=OUR+LA&emci=554888b0-6705-ee11-907c-00224832eb73&emdi=ea000000-0000-0000-0000-000000000001&ceid=](https://www.causeusa.org/news/2022/12/21/statewide-poll-reveals-multi-ethnic-views-of-racial-relations-political-representation-and-quality-of-life). “Less than half of APAs feel represented well in Los Angeles City Hall (46%), the lowest of any group by double digits.” CAUSE, Los Angeles Citywide Poll Reveals Multi-Ethnic Views of Racial Relations, Political Representation, and Quality of Life (December 21, 2022), available at <https://www.causeusa.org/news/2022/12/21/statewide-poll-reveals-multi-ethnic-views-of-racial-relations-political-representation-and-quality-of-life>.

<sup>2</sup> When asked in the OUR LA survey how well the Council responds to your needs, a majority of Asian and NHPI respondents said not at all or only a little.

<sup>3</sup> Despite high levels of enthusiasm for voting in 2022, few AAPI voters are reached out to by candidates, political parties, or their representatives, with majorities across Asian ethnic groups reporting that no one reached out to them to vote or register to vote. Pat Brown Institute for Public Affairs and California Community Foundation, #VoicesofLA AAPI Survey Results (March 15, 2022), available at <https://calstatela.patbrowninstitute.org/pbi-in-the-news/2022-voices-of-la-aapi-survey/>.

<sup>4</sup> AAPI Equity Alliance is a partner of OUR LA, a multiracial, multi-generational, and multi-intersectional coalition of community-based organizations and racial justice advocates committed to community voice, multiracial solidarity, power-building, racial equity, structural reform, and transparency.

<sup>5</sup> In a December 2022 poll of registered voters, 67% of APA respondents favored increasing the size of the Council. CAUSE, California Community Poll: City of Los Angeles Toplines, available at <https://www.strategies360.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/22-545-CA-Community-Poll-12.22-LA-Toplines.pdf>. In the OUR LA survey conducted in March 2023, 63% of BIPOC respondents supported expanding the Council and 73% of Asians said increasing the number of Councilmembers would have a positive effect on how well the Council responds to their needs - the highest among all racial and ethnic groups - while 64% of NHPIs said the same. Finally, AAPI Equity Alliance, a coalition of more than 40 community-based organizations serving the 1.5 million AAPIs in Los Angeles County, polled its member organizations and 90% of respondents favored expansion.

<sup>6</sup> In the OUR LA survey, 62% of BIPOC respondents supported creating an IRC, and Asian respondents had the highest rate of reporting that an IRC would positively affect how well the Council responds to their needs (73%), with a majority of NHPIs saying the same (60%). In AAPI Equity Alliance’s survey, 100% of respondents favored an IRC.

<sup>7</sup> AAPI Data, State of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders in the United States (2022), available at <https://aapidata.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/State-AANHPIs-National-June2022.pdf>.