

Written Testimony

ORAL TESTIMONY (OCBOS, DISTRICT 2, COSTA MESA – AUGUST 12, 2021)

Intro:

lakwe. My name is Kelani Silk. I am of Marshallese and Kiribati Origin and have been a resident of Orange County for 36 years, of which 12 were spent in Costa Mesa. I am here on behalf of the Marshallese community. Though we are a small community in number, I am here to ensure that our voice is heard and present. To that end, we are involved in statewide and local redistricting as a member of the People's Redistricting Alliance.

My community is:

I represent a vibrant and resilient, faith-based community where the traditional customs of our ancestors can still be seen and practiced to this day, in each of our community homes. Our current population is roughly 5,000 peppered throughout Orange County with the majority in Costa Mesa. As one of the oldest Marshallese communities here on the continent, we play a vital role in preserving the Marshallese heritage and addressing the unique needs to the Marshallese diaspora. For many years the community here in Costa Mesa has been the link between the U.S. and the Marshall Islands in the Pacific and have been instrumental in combating healthcare and immigration issues that continue to plague immigrants from the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI).

My community is located:

Our serving areas include Newport Beach and Costa Mesa. with the heart of the community and majority members residing in Costa.

My community is similar to the following neighborhoods:

Costa Mesa is similar to Irvine; many live in multi-generational households of 2 or 3 generations, 50% speak other than English in the household, at least 85% are high school graduates and the percent of those 65 years and older is similar at 10.5%.

What makes my community special is:

Being from a Compact of Free Association (COFA) nation we are not eligible for programs such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and Covid-19 Funeral Assistance grants. Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander (NHPI) data has yet to be disaggregated for many service providing agencies so we are not lumped into the Asian-Pacific category where the special needs specifically for our Marshallese communities are over-shadowed by the larger population. We ask for continual support of the Compact Impact Fairness Act as we push forward through the pandemic.

In conclusion:

Our roots lie here in Costa Mesa; it is here that many of our social events; church gatherings and outreach work exist. It is in Costa Mesa that four to five generations of Marshallese flourish and it is here that we hope to build the capacity to better assist ourselves.

Komol tata, Thank you.

Kelani Silk

Pacific Islander Health Partnership

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