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November 5, 2018

VIA CERTIFIED MAIL

Hon. Greg Marvel, Clerk (gmarvel@srvusd.net)
Members of the Board of Education
c/o Superintendent Rick Schmitt (superintendent@srvusd.net)
San Ramon Valley Unified School District [70180360000118150632]
699 Old Orchard Drive
Danville, CA 94526

Ms. Renee Beck, City Clerk (cityclerk@sanramon.ca.gov)
Members of the City Council
City of San Ramon [70180360000118150625]
7000 Bollinger Canyon Road
San Ramon CA 94583

Ms. Susan F. Brooks, District Clerk
Members of the Board of Directors
c/o William Ross, Esq. (wross@lawross.com)
San Ramon Valley Fire District [70180360000118150601]
1500 Bollinger Canyon Road
San Ramon CA 94583

Mr. Daniel McIntyre, General Manager (mcintyre@dsrsd.com)
Members of the Board of Directors
Dublin San Ramon Services District [70180360000118150618]
7051 Dublin Boulevard
Dublin, CA 94568

Ms. Marie Sunseri, City Clerk (Msunseri@danville.ca.gov)
Members of the Town Council
Danville Town Office [70180360000118150595]
510 La Gonda Way
Danville, CA 94526

Re: Petition to Comply with the California Voting Rights Act ("CVRA")

Dear Ms. Beck, Ms. Brooks, Mr. McIntire, Ms. Sunseri, and Elected Officials:

In 2001, the Legislature determined that the use of at-large elections (by cities and districts that are characterized by racially polarized voting) dilutes the influence of minority voting blocs. The CVRA created a private right of action to require the jurisdiction to elect its governing body from single-member districts. For example, Dublin Unified School District recently received a demand letter from the Southwestern Voter Registration Education Project, which led it to adopt districts.¹ On behalf the Bay Area Voting Rights Initiative ("BAVRI"), I give notice of our belief, supported by evi-

¹<https://www.dublin.k12.ca.us/cms/lib/CA01001424/Centricity/Domain/1/Shenkman%20Letter%20re%20CVRA.pdf>

dence, that at-large voting dilutes minority electoral influence in the election of each of the legislative bodies in San Ramon Valley, thus violating [Elections Code Section 14047](#). Your councils and boards should consider this advice as an opportunity to engage the community in a collaborative process that avoids adversary litigation.

REGIONAL CONSIDERATION OF SINGLE-MEMBER CONSTITUENCIES

This may be the first proposal to consider and implement this reform on a regional basis. Doing so has both economies and synergies. Elections Code, Section 10010 permits an attorney to charge each jurisdiction up to \$30,000 for work performed in connection with the petition. Although I intend to represent the minority voters vigorously throughout the proceeding, unless there is litigation, the expense will likely be far below the cumulative limit. These fees are only a portion of costs that can be significant, especially for smaller jurisdictions. Despite the legislature’s invitation to collaborate, jurisdictions often spend larger amounts to hire their own attorney and demographer. (Martinez budgeted \$60,000 for a defensive demographer and another \$45,000 for outside counsel, even though it only has 20,000 voters.²) Perhaps more critically, explaining the process to constituents requires a substantial commitment by the council and board members themselves; they must conduct a series of public hearings. Coordinating these processes will both streamline public input and improve its quality. As detailed below, an integrated approach will treat the San Ramon Valley as a political ecosystem and improve the quality of its democracy for each jurisdiction.

In this petition, BAVRI represents members of the Asian community, which is concentrated in San Ramon, Dublin and in unincorporated areas near the border between Contra Costa and Alameda Counties. The most recent officials estimate for citizens of voting age (CVAP) come from census survey data that are based on observations that occurred between 2012 and 2016. Since that time, the Census Bureau has estimated an increase in the Asian share of the total population.

	Population [2010]	Asian Population share	Adult citizen share
San Ramon	74365	45.6%	34.6%
Dublin (Alameda Cty portion of DSRSD)	54525	40.5%	30.5%
Danville town	43760	14.6%	12.2%
Norris Canyon Census Designated Place	1045	59.3%	58.9%
Camino Tassajara CDP	3455	48.6%	42.3%
Blackhawk CDP	9470	24.0%	17.3%

² <http://www.cityofmartinez.org/civicax/filebank/blobdload.aspx?BlobID=16602#page=3>

Alamo CDP	16080	7.6%	6.9%
Diablo CDP	805	2.5%	2.9%
TOTAL	203505	33.5%	24.9%

Note: this does not include five additional precincts that are in either the school or fire district. There are at least 2500 residents of Iranian ancestry whom the census may not consistently code as Asian,

Subsequent sections of this letter discuss the right of the Asian community to an opportunity that is equal to that of the rest of the electorate to influence elections in favor of the candidates of its choice (and why this entitles the community to district elections). The reform will increase opportunities for Asian candidates to run for local positions, and possibly to progress to higher office.

However, electing council and board members from actual neighborhoods has benefits for all residents. The legislature intended the low threshold for CVRA relief to create a strong presumption in favor of truly local elections, in part to counterbalance the effect of uniform legislation in a state as large and diverse as California. Although district elections are new to Contra Costa County, they are the norm in most of the state. In all of California, only one city (Irvine) with a larger population than San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District holds at-large elections.

The costs of running as a candidate in such large jurisdictions can be high. District elections can increase the candidate pool, by enabling grass-roots activists to run for office by knocking on neighbors' doors. Single-member constituencies make your bodies more representative of localized communities of interest. Neighborhood board members are often more capable of generating support for parcel taxes and bonds.

These benefits are particularly important in the San Ramon Valley. In each of your jurisdictions, competition for office has not always been vigorous. Since none of the jurisdictions has term limits, the average age and tenure of its elected members is high. Few seek higher office. With the exception of Joan Buchanan's election to the Assembly in 2008, the region has been almost entirely represented by non-residents since Ellen Tauscher retired 20 years ago. Non-competitive at-large elections may explain why San Ramon Valley punches below its weight in county, state, and national politics.

The CVRA provides an opportunity to make organic changes to the electoral practices of a city or special district without the costs of a ballot question. [Elections Code, Section 10650](#) (special districts); [Government Code, Section 34886](#) (cities). Not only can a jurisdiction move from at-large to districted elections, but it can change the size of its board (within the relevant statutory limitations). It can add (or eliminate) an elected mayor, although this has not been required. School districts face the formality of applying to the State Board of Education for a waiver of the ballot question, but the

State Board has granted at least 164 such waivers with little controversy. [Education Code, Section 5019\(a\) or 5020\(d\) \(voter approval required\); Section 33050 \(waiver\)](#)

STATUTORY REQUIREMENT FOR PROMPT CONSIDERATION

This petition has been filed on the eve of an election, so as to prevent this reform from becoming a partisan issue. The legal claim does not allege intentional discrimination and in no way relates to the merits of any individual incumbent or candidate. San Ramon will elect its first Asian council member tomorrow, since there are more vacancies than there are non-Asian candidates. This does not eliminate the need for a permanent reform or refute the legal predicate. Elections Code, Section 14028(a) limits the probative value of elections conducted after the petition is filed.

The timing of the petition also intends to make possible a negotiation to extend the demanding deadlines of the statute. Normally, the city or district must decide whether to adopt single member constituencies within 45 days, and then conduct at least five public hearings over a period of 90 days, in order to avail itself of a safe harbor from litigation (and to enjoy the \$30,000 fee cap).³ Under AB 350, passed in 2015, the fee cap is a quid pro quo for completing the entire process in 135 days or less (mid-March 2019). Prolonging this process generally increases the hours that I bill above the time that I can recover under the cap. However, I have accommodated jurisdictions that have shown a need to extend the deadline. Effective January 1, 2019, AB 2123 will limit any such extensions to three months and absolutely preclude agreements to defer implementation until after the census. While my client intends that your jurisdictions comply in the November 2020 election, we would consider negotiating an extended schedule for conducting the hearing and passing the required ordinance (or resolution), especially if you establish a joint redistricting commission (as proposed below).

The last regular meeting at which you can opt for the safe harbor is December 11, 2018 in the case of the city of San Ramon and San Ramon Valley Unified School District (SRVUSD), December 17, 2018 in the case of the San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District (SRVFPD), December 18, 2018, in the case of Dublin San Ramon Services

³ To preserve its safe harbor, the jurisdiction must declare an intention to move to district elections within 45 days. At this point, the city can have up to 90 more days to specify its plan. There must be a series of four public hearings, two before the city presents maps and two after. [Elections Code, Section 10010\(a\)](#). It is generally understood that the criteria correspond to those codified for population-based reapportionments and generally for municipalities: topography; geography; cohesiveness, contiguity, integrity, and compactness of territory; and community of interest. [Elections Code 22000\(a\); Government Code, Section 34884\(a\)\(1\) \[A.B. 278 \(2016\)\]](#). The mapping of districts, the sequence in which district members are elected, and other procedural change cannot have the effect of diminishing the ability of citizens of a race, color or language minority group to elect the candidates of their choice. [52 U.S.C. §10304\(b\)](#).

District (DSRSD), and December 20, 2018 in the case of town of Danville. I am happy to extend the initial deadline in light of the holidays, but any further extensions not agreed by those dates would be subject to the restrictions of AB 2123. Absent an extension, the safe harbor will expire between March 11 and March 20, 2019.

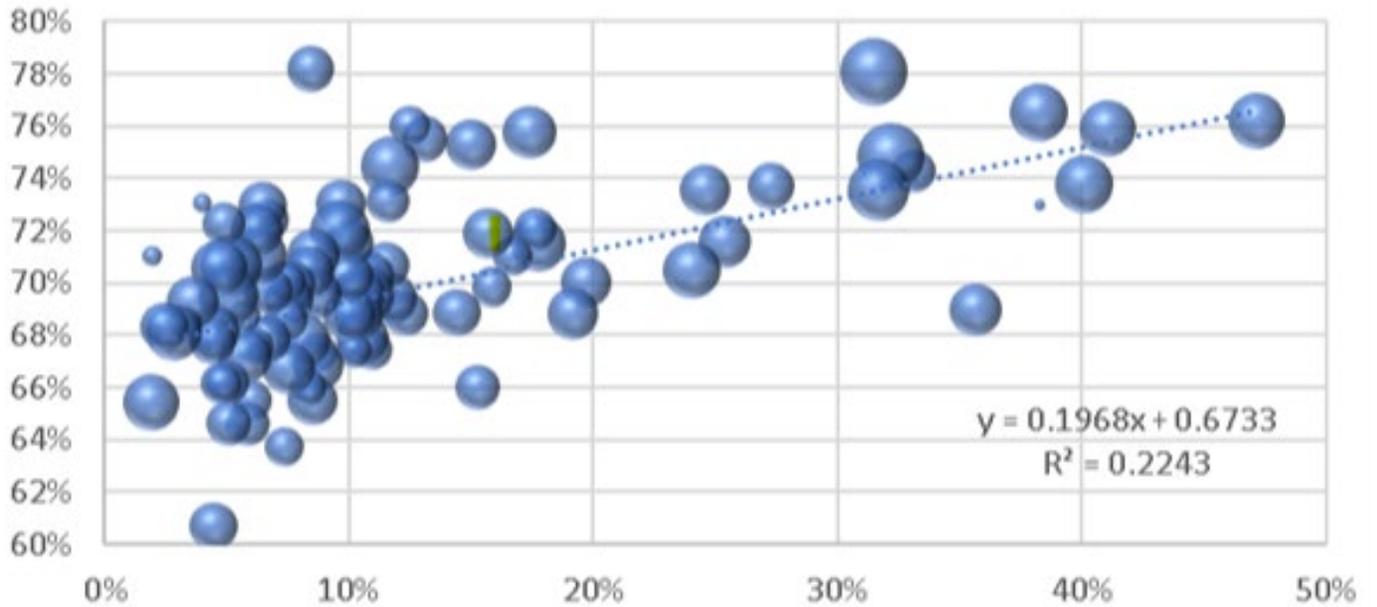
EXPLANATION OF RACIALLY POLARIZED VOTING

“The failure of minority candidates to be elected to office does not by itself establish the presence of racially polarized voting.” *Jaguero v. Palmdale*, (2014) [226 Cal. App. 4th 781](#). However, [Elections Code, Section 14028\(a\)](#) does require a showing of racially polarized voting. Racially polarized voting occurs when some candidates preferred by one race or language group receive a higher level of support from that group than from the electorate at-large.⁴ This differential is inferred by comparing the vote share in precincts in which different percentages of the voters belong to the race or group in question. Proof of intentional discrimination by voters or elected officials is not required. [Elections Code, Section 14028\(d\)](#). All that is necessary is to show that member of a race or language group vote differently than other voters. This can be demonstrated by examining ballot questions, as well as candidate races. African-American voters support criminal justice reforms more strongly than others. Latino voters support candidates and propositions that improve the treatment of immigrants. Asian voters support education more strongly than the rest of the electorate. It is almost self-evident that racial and ethnic groups vote differently, and the CVRA establishes no minimum threshold. Therefore, almost no jurisdiction contests the existence of racially polarized voting.

Consider two recent statewide ballot questions. In 2016, Senator Ricardo Lara sponsored Proposition 58, to repeal most elements of Proposition 227 (1998), which effectively banned bilingual education. The proposition passed overwhelmingly (74% yes) in most parts of the state, but by much smaller margins in most San Ramon Valley precincts without large numbers of Asian voters. The correlation is even stronger when Latino voters (coded as non-Asian in this chart) are considered in alliance with the Asian community.

⁴ [Elections Code, Section 14026\(e\)](#): “a difference ... in the choice of candidates or other electoral choices that are preferred by voters in a protected class, and in the choice of candidates and electoral choices that are preferred by voters in the rest of the electorate.”

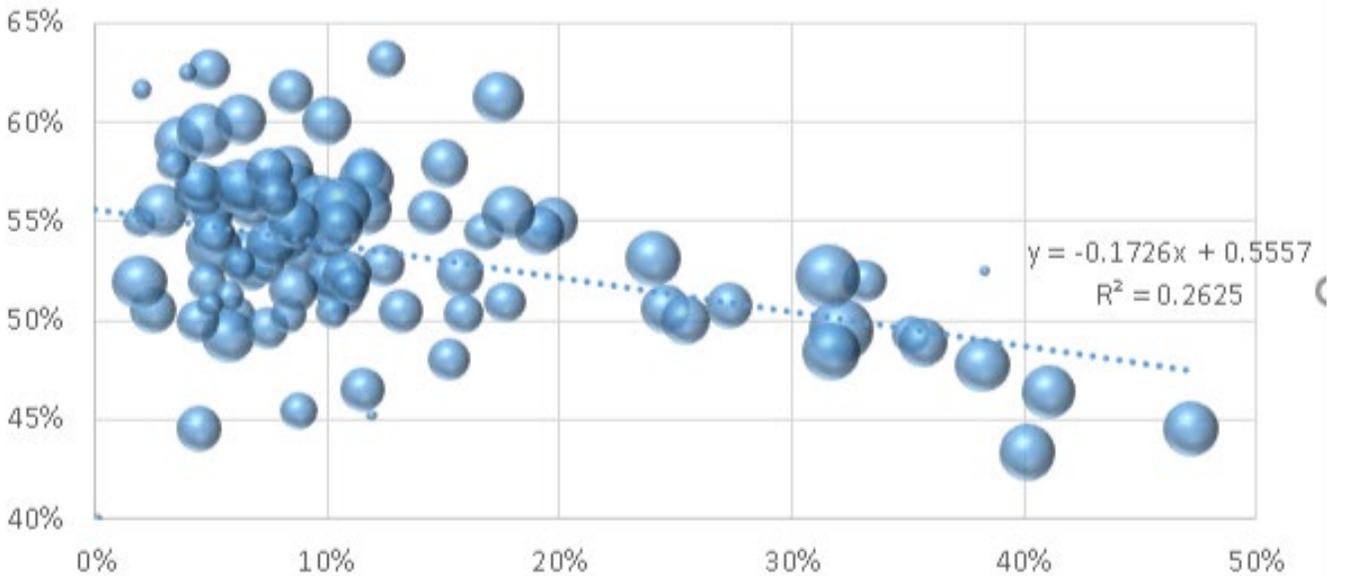
Support for Proposition 58 by San Ramon Valley Precincts



percent of voters in precinct who are Asian

Proposition 64 on marijuana revealed that the Asian community was less enthusiastic than the rest of the electorate. The ecological regression of high-Asian precincts infers that a majority of Asian voters opposed the proposition.

Support for Proposition 64 by San Ramon Valley Precincts



percent of voters in precinct who are Asian

Once racial polarization is established, it is probative, but not necessary, to show that minority candidates have been disproportionately unsuccessful in the at-large system. [Section 14028\(e\)](#). The federal Voting Rights Act does not prohibit at-large voting unless it is possible to create at least one district that has a majority of minority voters. However, the California Legislature has a much stronger preference for single member constituencies. Wherever there is racially polarization, the jurisdiction must create single member districts that attempt to increase the influence of minority voting blocs. The approval of voters or the concurrence of individual cities within the district is not required.

HISTORY AND IMPACT ON ELECTIONS IN SPECIFIC JURISDICTIONS

It is difficult to perform “endogenous” analyses (that rely on races for the specific jurisdiction) because there are few recent minority candidates, except for the city of San Ramon. To some extent, this may reflect the demoralization of the Asian voter, which depresses Asian turnout and affects up-ballot races. In large part, it reflects the high cost and campaign burden of campaigning in a large district in a low-profile race for a high-performing district. The result is a lack of authentic representation for all communities. Reform will open opportunities to minority candidates and to a new generation of public officials.

San Ramon Valley Unified School District

SRVUSD is the jewel in the crown of southern Contra Costa County. It is the reason so many families, especially Asian families, have chosen to live here. Of the approximately 24 districts in California with larger student enrollments, only six elect at-large. Two are in the Bay Area (San Francisco and Fremont). Fremont has an Asian majority student enrollment and an Asian board president. None of these districts has the A+ rating given SRVUSD by Niche. Irvine Unified is similar in size and performance, and voted unanimously to conduct its first district elections this fall.

District	county	students	population	size	niche	Latino%	Black%	Asian%
San Francisco Unified	San Francisco	58,414	817,501	7	B+	33%	15%	6%
Santa Ana Unified	Orange	53,131	258,097	5	C+	81%	1%	7%
San Bernardino City Unified	San Bernardino	53,027	255,835	7	C-	60%	13%	4%
San Juan Unified	Sacramento	49,114	322,820	5	B-	14%	5%	5%
Fontana Unified	San Bernardino	39,470	178,493	5	C	75%	7%	4%
Fremont Unified	Alameda	34,208	218,172	5	A-	15%	4%	51%
San Ramon Valley Unified	Contra Costa			5	A+	7%	2%	27%
Mt. Diablo Unified	Contra Costa	31,923	255,055	5	B-	24%	4%	12%
IN TRANSITION								
West Contra Costa Unified	Contra Costa	30,596	240,308	5	C	32%	18%	19%
Irvine Unified School District	Orange	31,392	195,423	5	A+	10%	6%	38%

The case for trustee area elections in SRVUSD is quite different than it has been in a nearby district that has resisted the reform. That district has serious performance

and equity problems that may be ameliorated by giving the underrepresented community a voice on the Board. SRVUSD has no such challenges. But the incumbents have built a high level of performance into the administration of the District. That achievement is unlikely to be at risk if the reform results in turnover of long-term Board members.

No minority has ever been elected to the SRVUSD board. Only three of the last six elections have been contested. The current president was appointed in 2009 and reelected in 2010 and 2014. The past president was elected in 2006. The clerk was appointed in lieu in 2008, won election in 2012, and faced no opposition in 2014. When a two-term incumbent resigned six months before this election, the Board appointed Susanna Ordway, an Asian. Trustee Ordway and two other incumbents faced no opposition.

Prior to the recent appointment, the average tenure was over 10 years. No non-incumbent had won election since 2010. Two current members were appointed to unfilled terms and continued as incumbents. A third incumbent joined the Board by seeking an open seat without opposition.

In 2010, 2012, and 2014, there were contested elections, with only one additional candidate. In 2010, there was an open seat. In the subsequent contests, the incumbents campaigned together and defeated the challenger, even in 2014, when the challenger outspent all the incumbents combined. Although each challenger was a non-Hispanic white male, the pattern demonstrates the hurdle that an Asian candidate would face challenging long-time incumbents in a high-performing school district.

By appointing Trustee Ordway, the Board may have intended to recognize the value of having a representative of the Asian community. This sets the stage for an **elected** representative, who can serve as authentic choice of the Asian community.

San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District

SRVFPD has not had a minority trustee in recent history. In 2012, three non-Hispanic white candidates defeated Gerardo Peniche. In most other respects, the electoral history of SRVFPD resembles that of the school district. Only three of the last six elections have been contested, and all other candidates have been non-Hispanic whites. Two incumbents are appointees.

Dublin-San Ramon Services District

Since 2004, Edward Duarte is the only non-incumbent to be elected trustee. He is also the only minority and the only resident of Contra Costa County to serve on the Board. The two non-Hispanic white male incumbents were elected in 2004 and faced a contested election in 2012. The two non-Hispanic white female incumbents were appointed in 2009 and 2015 and faced contested elections the year following their

appointment. All live in Dublin. All are non-Hispanic whites, who comprise a minority of only 41 percent of Dublin's population.

At-large elections are particularly unfair to Contra Costa County, which accounts for approximately 40 percent of the voters and population of this special district. In the event that an insufficient number of candidates apply, an appointment is made by the Alameda County Supervisors. [Elections Code, Section 10515\(c\)](#). The Board can fill vacancies that occur in advance of an election, but they apparently feel no need for representation that is geographically or ethnically balanced, since in the last decade, they have picked two non-Hispanic whites from Dublin.

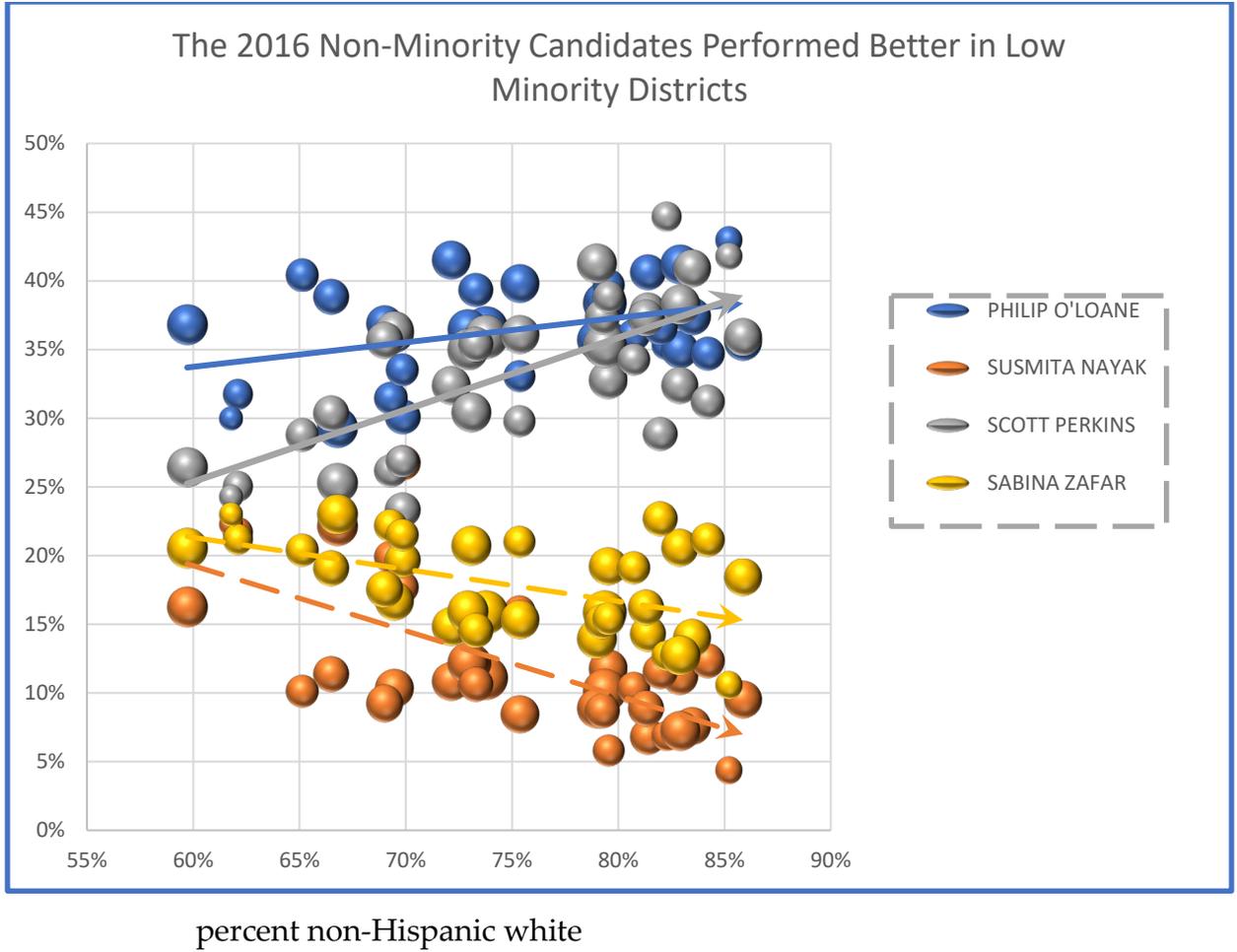
City of San Ramon

Asians outnumber non-Hispanic whites within the city of San Ramon (45.6% v. 42.1%). Yet the mayor and city council members are all non-Hispanic white males, one of whom has served continuously for 20 years. The mayor is serving his third term, after having served three terms on the school board.

San Ramon twice defeated efforts to move its municipal elections to November of even years. It adopted this change shortly before the Legislature required all jurisdictions with low turnout to use statewide election dates.⁵ All of the incumbents were elected by virtue of these off-year elections, the most recent of which (in 2013) had a turnout of 24 percent. The council used a previous off-year election (with a turnout of 23%) to convert one of the council seats to a mayor elected at-large. In San Ramon's only even-year election to date (2016), two of the white male incumbents still defeated two female Asian challengers. In fact, each of the incumbents beat each of the challengers in every precinct. This is not necessarily surprising given the demoralization of Asian voters, the difficulty of recruiting support for an unprecedented challenge by young Asian candidates, and the high cost of campaigning on a city-wide basis. There is no implication that these candidates could not have been more successful had they been able to focus their campaign within their own neighborhood community.

As the following chart shows, the Asian candidates fared significantly better in high-minority communities, while the white candidates gained their highest vote in precincts that had very few Asians or Latinos.

⁵ AB 415 (2015) added [Section 14050](#), et seq., the Voter Participation Rights Act.



Town of Danville

Danville also has an all-white, non-Latino town council. Danville is not immune from the racially polarized voting that is demonstrable throughout the San Ramon Valley and in most parts of California. However, there are some factors that would make Danville a lower priority on a standalone basis. Only 15% of total population is Asian; 7% Latino; and 2% black. Only about 20 percent of all adult citizens are minorities. This is no defense to CVRA litigation, and some attorneys have accepted cases against smaller jurisdictions or where minorities are small percentages of total population.⁶ These are not situations in which the high price of campaigning in a larger city is as high a barrier to the entry of minority candidates.

⁶ To cite the most extreme case, Desert Center Unified School District in Riverside County received a demand letter. It has a population of 163 adults, who may be liable for \$30,000 in attorneys' fees plus implementation costs.

	population	% Latino	% black	% Asian
Yucca Valley	20700	17%	6%	2%
Eureka	27191	10%	2%	6%
Twentynine Palms	25048	23%	9%	4%
Seal Beach	24168	13%	1%	9%

CVRA does not require that it be possible to create a district in which the protected group has a majority – or even a plurality large enough to guarantee influence. But the effectiveness of the remedy is a factor I consider in determining whether a case should be pursued. Asian community within Danville is concentrated in block groups in the East and South that could support an Asian minority district with a significantly higher share of adult citizens than was achieved in Martinez.

Ultimately, Danville is part of the larger political ecosystem of the San Ramon Valley. It has an opportunity to join in a regional reform at a substantially reduced cost. While it is not the primary focus of my clients’ concerns, it should consider the possible benefits of districting to all its residents. It would be my intention to limit any bill presented to Danville to the incremental cost of supporting its process.

ADDITIONAL BENEFITS AND CONSIDERATIONS

Although my client shares the Legislature’s desire not to defer districting until after the census results in 2021, the Legislature has also facilitated the creation of local independent redistricting commissions, which has become increasingly popular among citizens. A coordinated regional reform provides a basis for a joint or county-sponsored commission that provides an assurance of a districting process that is fair to both incumbents and potential challengers. These commissions can be judicially approved in a consent order at the conclusion of a collaborative CVRA process under AB 350 or they can be established under the new statutory authority.

Although the Legislature has promoted collaboration, many jurisdictions feel compelled to retain their own demographer and defense counsel, as if litigation were inevitable. While my clients have directed me to achieve an effective remedy for the entire protected class of Asian voters, this is not inconsistent with a map and implementation schedule that is customized to meet local needs. If requested, I can provide map options to the specifications of any incumbent, provided that there is also an opportunity to present the option proposed by the Asian community. In one ongoing proceeding, the map proposed by the school district’s own demographer, who has very extensive experience, was rejected by the County Committee on School District

Organization in favor of one that emulated our initial map. Our subsequent revision is widely favored in the community. I believe that a collaborative effort can minimize costs for all jurisdictions.¹

CONCLUSION

While you may choose to portray this as a “threat of litigation,” it is an effort to engage in a collaborative process to comply with the CVRA on a basis that will likely satisfy most of office-holders and constituents, including those who currently have reservations. This is not an attempt to displace incumbents, but rather to make a seat at the table for the Asian community and possibly for any other neighborhoods that have been chronically underrepresented. It is an attempt to equalize the protected group’s ability to promote its candidates of choice, who may or may not be genetically Asian, but who reflects their values and authentic preferences. But it is more critically an opportunity to make local government in the San Ramon Valley more truly representative, to revitalize the engagement of the community in jurisdictions whose elections have been neglected, and to create opportunities for a new generation of political leaders that is as diverse as the growing population of the Valley.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Scott J. Rafferty". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Scott J. Rafferty