



Submitted via Email

To the Fresno COG staff and 6th Cycle RHNA Sub-Committee:

I am writing to you all today to provide comments and feedback on the Fresno COG's 6th Cycle RHNA subcommittee process so far and to provide recommendations for how FCOG can comply with its duties to facilitate and seek public participation in the development and adoption of the 6th Cycle RHNA moving forward.

Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability works collaboratively and alongside the most impacted communities throughout the County of Fresno to advocate for sound policy and eradicate injustice to secure equal access to opportunity regardless of wealth, race, income, and place. We are uniquely poised to provide input to FCOG on its process for its development and adoption of a 6th Cycle RHNA methodology and into the RHNA methodology itself, based on our daily work with community residents and leaders throughout Fresno County to address barriers to access to decent, affordable housing, a healthy living environment, and fair housing choice in the region. Our close work with community leaders and residents has allowed us to understand community needs and priorities and community-driven priorities drives our work on a daily basis.

Public participation and feedback is an essential tool that must be employed to create fair and equitable housing policies and outcomes and is a mandatory component of the 6th Cycle RHNA methodology development process. Gov. Code Sec. 65584.04. Specifically, Government Code Section 65584.04(d) requires FCOG to make diligent efforts to achieve public participation of all economic segments of the community and classes protected by the Fair Employment and Housing Act in the development of the RHNA methodology and in the process of drafting and adoption of the allocation of the regional housing needs. However, the 6th Cycle RHNA is falling short of meeting this public participation duty at the beginning of the process, and without alteration, the process is unlikely to result in achievement of meaningful participation.

The lack of meaningful participation and efforts by FCOG to solicit it is most recently highlighted by the first RHNA subcommittee meeting held on January 21st, 2020. As one of the three at-large members at the meeting, my presence was met with confusion and reluctance. Action Item 4A of the agenda gave subcommittee members the opportunity to review and adopt the Subcommittee Charter during this meeting. However, during this item one of the subcommittee members questioned why a CBO was provided a seat on the committee and why were we allowed to have a vote. None of the other two at large members were questioned or minimized. Leadership Counsel is currently the only CBO **out of twenty members** in the subcommittee and the only confirmed non-agency member which works directly with protected classes based to advance their interests as a central component of its mission. Gov. Code Sec. 12955 lists and protects the following classes of people which differ in: race, color, sex, gender, gender identity,



gender expression, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, ancestry, familial status, source of income, disability, veteran or military status yet, except for my organization's presence on the committee as a representative of communities of color and immigrant communities, none of these protected classes are being represented through an organization or individually to express their housing needs. Fresno has a notable number of organizations and community based organizations that would properly represent said protected classes such as Barrios Unidos, Faith in the Valley, or Fresno Building Healthy Communities to name a few. In addition, Fresno has numerous independent community leaders who advocate for the needs of specific protected classes. We would be more than happy to provide additional recommendations to FCOG of CBOs and community leaders which it could invite to have a seat on the RHNA sub-committee in order to expand representation of protected classes in accordance with the law.

Along with the lack of community based organizations at the meeting, there was also a significant lack of public awareness and participation at the first subcommittee meeting even by one of our own at large members who had no knowledge of holding a seat. At our first subcommittee meeting, the Fresno Housing Authorities representative did not show up, which is not unusual but upon further discussion with several representatives from the Fresno Housing Authority, we were informed that they were unaware they held a seat on this committee and even asked us how they could participate in the RHNA process. We had previously been informed by Fresno COG staff that all at large seats had been filled and accepted, which was a reason why they could not invite another CBO onto the subcommittee.

Our Subcommittee Charter states that "Members of the public are welcome to attend and observe meetings," but no prior outreach and promotion of the meeting occurred. If one of our members of the subcommittee was not informed, how then has the general public been informed? Having language in the subcommittee charter alone is not sufficient and does not satisfy the City's obligation to make a "diligent effort." There must be a consistent and strong approach to engaging the public in this process.

We recommend and urge the Fresno COG to publicly advertise and promote the sub-committee meetings and public hearings throughout the whole RHNA process. This can consist of advertising in both English and foreign language media such as radio, print, or TV which oftentimes allow for free public service announcements. Or partnering with FUSD, CUSD, and other school districts throughout the county that can inform parents on this important process. Having the agendas on the COG website simply is not enough. Finding and attending a meeting should not be difficult. Meetings should have interpretation services available, all materials should be available before each meeting and documents should be translated. Community workshops should be held throughout the whole process. We also recommend that the subcommittee and FCOG prepare a public participation plan to guide the RHNA process. There should be a timelines, specific actions commitments, and public participation goals put in place



in order to hold the subcommittee and the Fresno COG accountable for meeting goals and making sure there is a diligent effort in engaging the protected classes in Gov. Code Sec. 12955.

As we begin the 6th Cycle RHNA process in the County of Fresno, we need to ensure that community voices are heard and at the forefront of identifying housing needs. We cannot afford to make the same mistakes when it comes to housing development in Fresno. We must begin this process with strong public participation and outreach.

We hope you take our comments into consideration and we thank you for your time. If any questions arise, do not hesitate to contact me at kmartinez@leadershipcounsel.org.

Sincerely,

Karla Martinez

Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability