



JOEL ANDERSON
SUPERVISOR, SECOND DISTRICT
SAN DIEGO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

AGENDA ITEM

DATE: April 30, 2024

26

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

**ADOPTION OF A NEW POPULATION CATEGORY FOR SAN DIEGANS OF
MIDDLE EASTERN AND NORTH AFRICAN DESCENT (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

OVERVIEW

The Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) communities in San Diego County face a significant challenge due to the absence of a specific ethnicity category in data collection for this population. Despite being home to one of the largest refugee settlement communities in California, San Diego County residents of MENA descent often self-identify as Caucasian/White on U.S. Census and other government forms because there is no dedicated ethnicity category for them.

On March 28, 2024, the White House Office of Management and Budget announced that new standards will be used to collect federal data on race and ethnicity, including the addition of a Middle Eastern or North African category for the 2030 Census. April is also National Arab-American Heritage Month in the United States, highlighting the importance of recognizing and celebrating the rich cultural heritage of MENA communities. Additionally, legislation (Assembly Bill 2763) is pending in the California State Legislature that would add a MENA category for demographic forms used in California.

In light of the federal changes to the collection of MENA information and the potential changes to state law regarding the collection of data for MENA groups, the County should provide for the self-identification for the MENA population living in the San Diego region. By providing a more inclusive and accurate representation of the MENA community, we can ensure that their voices are clearly heard, their needs are addressed, and their contributions are recognized.

Therefore, I recommend that the Board support my recommendation to direct County staff to offer our residents of Middle Eastern and North African descent the option of self-identifying as MENA when filling out County documents and adopt a position of support for Assembly Bill 2763, the Middle Eastern and North African Inclusion Act.

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RECOMMENDATION(S)

SUPERVISOR JOEL ANDERSON

1. Direct the Interim Chief Administrative Officer to offer Middle Eastern and North African categories when obtaining ethnicity data during the administration of County programs and services.
2. Direct the Interim Chief Administrative Officer to express the County's support for Assembly Bill (AB) 2763, consistent with Board Policy M2.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Advocating for the inclusion of a Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) data collection category by County staff ensures equitable representation and recognition for individuals of Middle Eastern and North African descent, who currently face challenges in accurately identifying their cultural and ethnic backgrounds on federal, state and local documents. By requiring a MENA category, the County can further promote diversity, inclusivity, and cultural sensitivity in our data collection processes, thus fostering a more equitable society.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

The proposal to include a MENA category in federal, state and local data collection efforts strengthens our commitment to sustainability by ensuring that all members of our community are accurately represented and supported. By recognizing and addressing the unique needs of the MENA community, we contribute to the creation of inclusive and sustainable communities where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with today's item. There may be future fiscal impacts based on the recommendations from today's action. Any such recommendation would return for consideration and approval by the Board.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

N/A

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

BACKGROUND

The Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) communities in San Diego County face a significant challenge due to the absence of a specific ethnicity category in data collection for this population. Despite being home to one of the largest refugee settlement communities in California, San Diego County residents of MENA descent often self-identify as Caucasian/White on U.S. Census and other government forms because there is no dedicated ethnicity category for them. El Cajon, for example, is one of the main refugee resettlement communities in the County

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and has a significant MENA population. This month, April, is National Arab-American Heritage Month in the United States, highlighting the rich cultural heritage of MENA communities. Although 43.5 percent of the city's population speaks a language other than English at home and 29 percent of the city is foreign born, according to census data, 58.5 percent of the city is ethnically classified as White. This misclassification results in a lack of visibility and recognition for the unique needs of the MENA population.

On March 28, 2024, the White House Office of Management and Budget announced that new standards will be used to collect federal data on race and ethnicity, including the addition of a Middle Eastern or North African category for the 2030 Census. The decision to collect this data will impact organizations receiving federal funding, determine congressional district boundaries, and influence equal employment policies.

In addition to the action being taken on the federal level, legislation is pending in the California State Legislature that would add a MENA category for demographic forms used in California. Assembly Bill AB 2763, the Middle Eastern and North African Inclusion Act, would require state agencies, boards or commissions to collect demographic data for Middle Eastern and North African populations. This legislation would also require, within 18 months after a decennial United States Census is released to the public, that state agencies, boards, or commissions update their data collection to reflect the additional Middle Eastern and North African groups as they are reported by the United States Census Bureau.

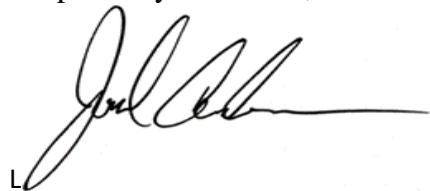
In light of the federal changes to the collection of MENA information and the potential changes to state law regarding the collection of data for MENA groups, the County should provide for the self-identification for the MENA population living in the San Diego region. By providing a more inclusive and accurate representation of the MENA community, we can ensure that their voices are clearly heard, their needs are addressed, and their contributions are recognized.

Therefore, I recommend that the Board support my recommendation to direct County staff to offer our residents of Middle Eastern and North African descent the option of self-identifying as MENA when filling out County documents and adopt a position of support for Assembly Bill 2763, the Middle Eastern and North African Inclusion Act.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

This advocacy initiative aligns with the Empower, Equity, and Community Initiatives of the County of San Diego's 2024-2029 Strategic Plan. By advocating for the inclusion of a Middle Eastern and North African ethnicity category for the collection of data, we demonstrate our commitment to promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion in all aspects of County operations and services.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joel Alvarado", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

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Supervisor, Second District

ATTACHMENT(S)
N/A