



Asian American Community Coalition on Redistricting and Democracy | accord.newyork@gmail.com | 718-460-5600

January 28, 2013

Districting Commission  
253 Broadway, 7<sup>th</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 10007

Honorable Members of the Districting Commission:

In the Commission’s latest Revised Map, 48<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Queens is used to divide District 19 from District 23. During last week’s public meeting of the Commissioners, Northern Boulevard was also proposed as a boundary. Despite overwhelming evidence and support for District 19 to have a southern boundary at 73<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, as in the Unity Map, the Commission ultimately did not affirm a position on where this boundary would be drawn.

**We are writing today to urge the Commission to unify Bayside, Queens, either by using 73<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, or at the very least, by using nothing north of the Long Island Expressway (LIE) as a boundary between District 19 and 23.**

Bayside is a vibrant commercial, residential and cultural center for a large and growing Asian American population – particularly Chinese and Korean Americans. **By 2010, Asians were 45% of this neighborhood.** The increase since 2000 had been a dramatic 44%. This means that unless this trend has changed entirely, Asian Americans are today quickly approaching a majority status in Bayside.<sup>1</sup>

**Northern Boulevard is not a reasonable boundary in Bayside.** Rather, this street is a main thoroughfare, and a commercial artery around which many Asian American households have settled. It also has many Korean and Chinese American businesses. Northern Blvd is not a dividing line, but the “Main Street” in Bayside.



Bayside – as defined in AALDEF’s “Community Boundaries Survey”

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted, however, that including all of Bayside in District 19 would make the district only 29.9% Asian – far from a majority Asian district, as some have mistakenly characterized it.

We acknowledge that Republicans in office and on the Commission may hope to draw District 19 in such a way that Republican candidates' chances at being elected are not hurt by the new boundaries. But **District 19's viability for Republican candidates is not affected by the inclusion of more of Bayside.** Registration rates for both major political parties change by less than one half of one percent (0.2% for Republicans, 0.1% for Democrats) when the LIE is used as the southern boundary to District 19, instead of 48<sup>th</sup> Avenue as done in the Dec 4<sup>th</sup> map. This is because the political party affiliations of voters living between 48<sup>th</sup> Ave and the LIE are only nominally different from the rest of the district. Thus, there is no partisan argument for keeping Bayside divided.

Our coalition's members are deeply concerned that a district plan **dividing the neighborhood of Bayside will disenfranchise the Asian American voters of Bayside – diluting them between two districts, and ultimately by taking away the opportunity for this minority community to elect a candidate of their choice.** Asian Americans are a protected group under the federal Voting Rights Act. But in 2009, Korean American voters in District 19 faced harassment, violence and voter discrimination during the city council election in which Asian voters rallied behind an Asian American candidate, who lost by a small margin. These incidents were detailed in a letter by the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund to the Department of Justice in 2010. Dividing Bayside removes thousands of Asian voters from District 19, and by splitting them between District 19 and 23 may deny Bayside's minority community an opportunity to elect a candidate of its choice.

While 73<sup>rd</sup> Avenue is the most proper southern boundary for District 19, we recognize that **the LIE is a natural boundary used often in Queens and may be suitable for District 19, as well.** Notably, other organizations in Northeast Queens such as the Queens Civic Congress and Bayside Hills Civic Association have publicly supported a configuration where Bayside is kept together down to the Long Island Expressway.<sup>2</sup>

It is difficult to overstate the importance of fair and principled district lines on the functioning of democracy. And when minority populations are involved, the tendency to use redistricting as a tactic to suppress minority communities is so strong that the federal Voting Rights Act specifically prohibits redistricting from having a discriminatory impact. Racial tensions are part of the political dynamics in Northeast Queens, with certain individuals opposed to the emergence of an Asian American population as active parts of the electorate. We ask that the Commission take special care with District 19 given the high Asian population of Bayside, and the documented instances of discrimination against Asian voters.

Ultimately, we urge the Commissioners to decide that community input, the legal mandates of the Voting Rights Act and the city's charter, as well as fairness and equality for minority voters will trump the interests of those who may be blind or indifferent to the profound injustice of a district map in which a community such as Bayside is not kept whole.

Thank you for your attention to these matters, and your hard work in this process.

We welcome your questions and feedback on this letter and its contents. Please contact James Hong at 718-460-5600 and [james.hong@minkwon.org](mailto:james.hong@minkwon.org).

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<sup>2</sup> *Queens Civic Congress Responds to Districting Commission's Report: Testimony by Richard C. Hellenbrecht, President.* Submitted on October 10, 2012 to the Districting Commission at the Queens public hearing in Long Island City.

Respectfully submitted,

**Asian American Community Coalition on Redistricting and Democracy**

Asian American Bar Association of New York

Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund

Asian Pacific Americans for Progress New York

Chhaya Community Development Corporation

Chinese Progressive Association

Indo-Caribbean Alliance

Korean Americans for Political Advancement

Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York

MinKwon Center for Community Action

OCA-NY

Taking Our Seat

United Chinese Association of Brooklyn

YWCA of Queens



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**Statement by the  
Asian American Community Coalition on Redistricting and Democracy to the  
New York City 2012-2013 Districting Commission  
for the Queens Borough's 3<sup>rd</sup> Round Public Hearing  
Delivered by James Hong**

January 14, 2013  
LaGuardia Community College, Little Theatre  
31-10 Thompson Ave., Queens, NY 11101

Good evening members and staff of the Districting Commission, Chairman Romano, citizens and residents of Queens. My name is James Hong, I will be speaking on behalf of ACCORD, the Asian American Community Coalition on Redistricting and Democracy.

Our coalition's purpose is to advocate for district maps that will keep together communities of interest, and prevent Asian Americans and other racial minorities from being disenfranchised by district boundaries.

There are now over half a million Asian Americans in Queens alone, and they are 22.8% of its population. To put it another way, fully half of New York City's entire Asian American population resides in this borough. But our presence is has not been fully and fairly acknowledged by this Commission.

We recognize there are positive changes in Queens in the Commission's latest map. The southern borders of the 25<sup>th</sup> district are now far more reflective of the Asian American community in Elmhurst. Flushing and the Bellerose/Glen Oaks/Floral Park area are kept whole in their respective districts.

But Richmond Hill and South Ozone Park still need further adjustment. Lefferts Blvd is still dividing the South Ozone Park area of this community. District 28 should also include John Adams High School, and the district's western boundary should be moved towards Woodhaven Blvd as much as possible.

Briarwood and Jamaica Hills was unwisely broken apart in the latest map (between District 24 and 29), and they should be re-united into a single district.

Most disturbing is the Commission's decision to shear the community of Bayside into District 19 and 23. This not only fails to reflect current demographics, it goes against the unanimous public input given at both Queens public hearings held by this Commission. Bayside is a community that

should be kept whole in District 19 with the Cross Island Parkway on its east, 73<sup>rd</sup> Avenue to its south and Clearview Expressway to its west.

As a coalition and a community we are here again in support of the Unity Map and asking this Commission to create a district plan that brings an equal voice to the Asian American residents and voters of Queens and all of New York City.

We want to ask you, Commission – is there justice, fairness and equality in the map that you have drawn for Queens, and for the rest of New York City? Does it recognize the rights of our city’s exploding Asian American and minority communities, or will it continue to divide us and use our population as human fillers for districts that are safely in the hands of one incumbent or another? You have the opportunity before you in this third round to decisively answer this question and we urge you to take it.

ACCORD’s members include the following organizations: Asian American Bar Association of New York, Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, Asian Pacific Americans for Progress New York, Chhaya CDC, Chinese Progressive Association, Indo-Caribbean Alliance, Korean Americans for Political Advancement, Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York, MinKwon Center for Community Action, OCA-NY, Taking Our Seat, United Chinese Association of Brooklyn, YWCA of Queens and Dr. Carol Huang of Queens, New York.