



chhaya CDC

Sustaining Homes
Strengthening Communities

STATEMENT OF RASEL KABIR RAHMAN
COMMUNITY AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT SPECIALIST
CHHAYA COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
TO THE
NYC DISTRICTING COMMISSION
January 14, 2013

My name is Rasel Rahman. I am here representing Chhaya CDC, a community organization based in Jackson Heights. We work primarily with the South Asian population in Queens on issues focused on housing and community development. In addition, I am resident of the Briarwood community. I am testifying today because South Asians - immigrants from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Tibet, Maldives, Afganistan and as well as Diaspora from places such as Caribbean- is one of the fastest growing ethnic population in New York city. The growth rate of our population in the last decade has been more than 159%.

However, to date, the South Asian community has had no representation on the City, State, and Congressional levels of New York City, despite our growing presence and influence. The South Asian community is a new and emerging immigrant group in NYC, and lives in concentrated communities in proximity to certain neighborhoods. South Asians tend to concentrate because of language limitations, cultural and community facilities, and a network of community members that can rely on each other for support.

One such community is the Bangladeshi community in Briarwood, Queens, where I have been living since 2007. This is also where my community lives, holds social and cultural events, shops, goes to worship. The neighborhood is as much a part of our community as much as the community is part of neighborhood.

The proposed redistricting separates Briarwood and Jamaica Hills and separates a common Bengali community. The dividing of a community that has not even come to fully grasp the implications of redistricting renders the divided community in a state of vulnerability and confusion. They cannot access certain resources that had previously been familiar to them. The unity of the group in a common district will encourage group solidarity and growing awareness of shared needs and concerns and as a result, growing civic engagement.

So, I am asking for Briarwood and Jamaica Hills to be kept together as it is now in 24 district. The proposed redistricting splits the community in two separate districts, which means that already limited resources, institutions and other important support system for the community gets divided into separate district.

chhaya CDC
37-43 77th Street, 2nd Floor
Jackson Heights, NY 11372
P (718) 478-3848
F (718) 651-1004

www.chhayacdc.org



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Conclusion – Keeping the South Asian Bangladeshi-American community in Briarwood Together

We urge this Task Force to take a closer look at these neighborhoods and ensure that South Asian Bangladeshi-American community are kept together and not splintered among newly-drawn districts. We also support AALDEF's Asian American Neighborhood Boundaries and Communities of Interest Survey, which lists the clusters and shared concerns/issues among certain Asian American communities.

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