TAKING OUR SEAT

The South Asian Voice in Redistricting

New York City Districting Commission
Redistricting Hearing for Queens County

Testimony of
John P. Albert, Taking Our Seat

January 14, 2013

Good evening, my name is John P. Albert and I am with Taking Our Seat, a Queens- based non-partisan, civic organization. Taking Our Seat was founded to empower South Asian-Americans (SAA) in the electoral process. Taking Our Seat has actively participated in the Districting Commission's public process and I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to present my testimony tonight. I also want to thank the Commission's staff for their assistance throughout this process.

According to the 2010 Census, there are 351,000 SAAs in New York City. This represents an increase of 61% over the past decade. Of these, nearly 60% reside in Queens County. The largest communities of SAAs are found in the following cluster of neighborhoods:

- Richmond Hill and South Ozone Park
- Briarwood and Jamaica Hills
- Jackson Heights and Elmhurst
- Bellerose and Floral Park
- Astoria and Long Island City

I want to focus my testimony on two of these neighborhood clusters.

The first is Briarwood and Jamaica Hills, found in district 24 and 29 under the November and December 4th plan. Throughout this process these two neighborhoods were kept together in one district, the 24th – when inexplicably and without any prior testimony to the contrary, the November and December plans split these two adjoining communities. These neighborhoods share a common South Asian characteristic, share common schools, common transportation lines and most importantly a common desire to be kept together in the 24th Council District.

The second is Richmond Hill in the 28th Council District. The November and December 4th plan does make some progress in addressing the decade's long dilution of South Asian American community in the neighborhood.

The community had made a strong case to stop the use of Lefferts Boulevard as a boundary. The November and December plans both keep Lefferts Boulevard as a boundary even though

it is only for a portion of the district. Moreover the proposed western boundary of the 28th district keeps key community institutions out of the district. The proposed western boundary of the 28th district keeps John Adams High School, the Jama Masid and the Thirumuti Temple – all centers of the South Asian community out of the district. We ask that the western boundary of the district be moved to Woodhaven Boulevard.

In closing I want to remind the Commission that Asians, including South Asians, are protected under the Voting Rights Act and approval from the Department of Justice will require that our community's vote is not diluted by the plan. We urge you to keep this fact in mind in drafting the next set of maps and in making your submission to the Department of Justice.

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