

NEW YORK DISTRICTING COMMISSION

TESTIMONY OF AMINTA KILAWAN

OCTOBER 10, 2012

Members of the New York Districting Commission:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify tonight. I appear before you today as the Human Rights Chair for the Global Organization for People of Indian Origin, as a member of the Shri Trimurti Bhavan Mandir (Hindu temple) in Ozone Park, as a founder of a progressive Hindu organization called Sadhana (www.sadhana.org), which translates to “faith in action”, as the Co-President of the North American South Asian Law Students Association (www.nasalsa.org) and as a third year student at Fordham Law School. But among all these titles, I am most proud to call myself a U.S. citizen, the first in my family to be born on New York City soil to hard-working Indo-Guyanese parents, raised in the diverse county of Queens.

Like many of my fellow South Asians and Indo-Caribbean people, my parents migrated to this country decades ago because it is the land of opportunity. Specifically they migrated to NYC because of its ability to respect culture while simultaneously promoting unity among all people. I’m most proud to be a citizen of the United States because one of the most basic, fundamental tenets in the United States is *democracy* – namely, “a country for the people by the people” as our Founding Fathers so aptly put it. When I was in grammar school in Ozone Park, I learned about the concept of “gerrymandering” – it’s safe to say that that is exactly what the current lines epitomize.

Members of the panel, I implore you to listen. Listen as I explain why certain areas of Richmond Hill, South Ozone Park, and Ozone Park must remain a cohesive whole. Listen as I explain why the existing lines for City Council Districts 28 and 32 do not make any logical sense. Listen to why the lines don’t represent democracy.

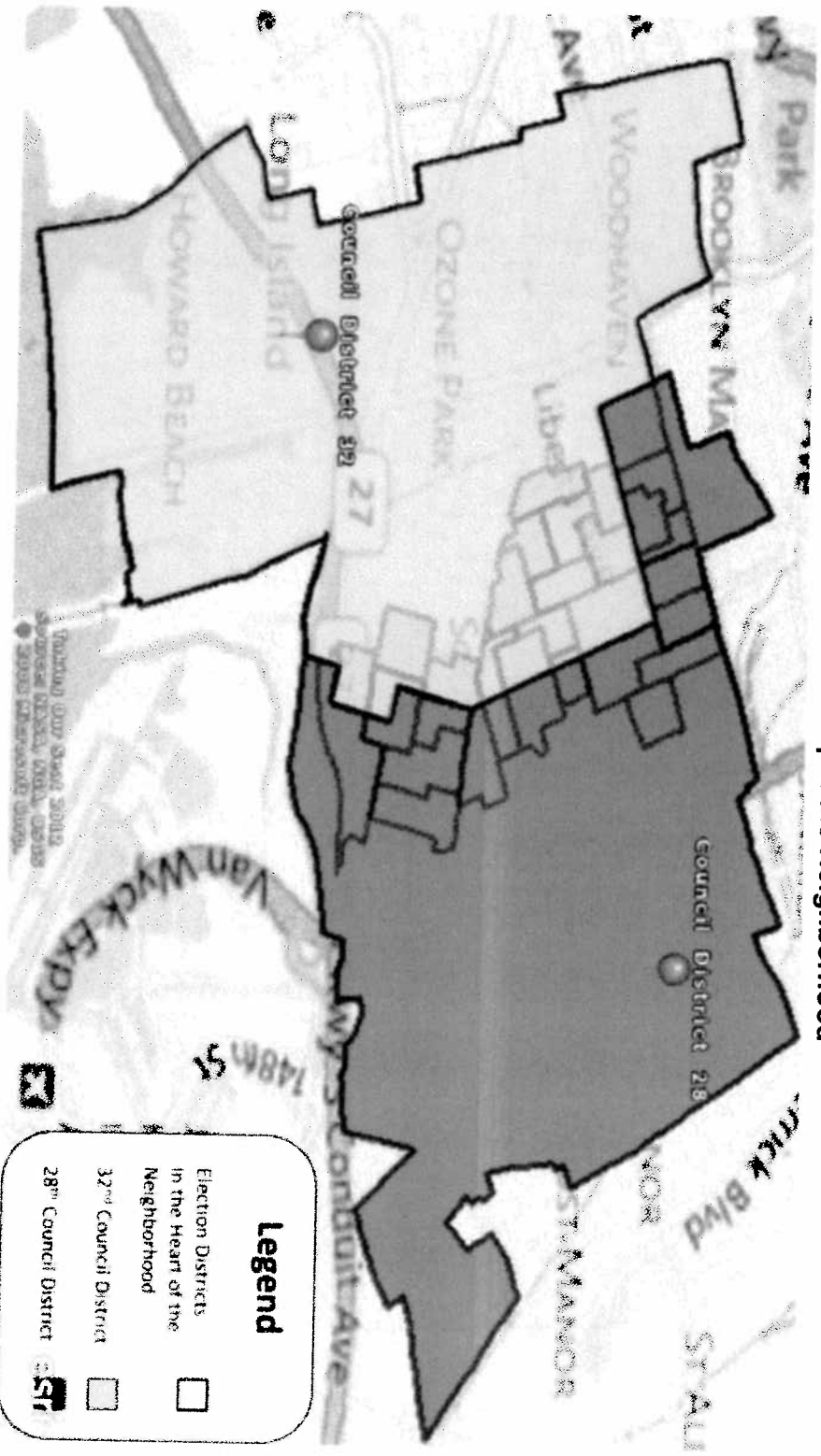
The current lines split one “community of interest” right down the middle. That community of interest is chopped down Lefferts Boulevard, which if you visited, would see serves as a hub for our “community of interest.” To its left, you have the mandir I worship in along with a plethora of other mandirs, gurdwaras and churches attended by the same “community of interest.” In the middle you’ve got the public transportation I’ve used to get to school every day for the last six years, the A train (at Lefferts Boulevard and Liberty Avenue) and the Q10/Q37 buses, which most individuals from this community utilize. To the right, you’ve got Richmond Hill High School and John Adams High School, where most of our young people attend. And all around you’ve got a myriad small businesses run by our entrepreneurial people, allowing local markets to thrive. These businesses include roti shops, bakeries, West Indian food supply stores, boutiques of traditional Indian attire.

I appreciate your sitting here and giving us all an opportunity to speak. However, once we walk out of this room, will our words be taken into account? Will democracy as we know it rightfully be served? Does it suffice to say, “Ah, we gave them a chance to voice their opinion. That’s all we were obligated to do.” Or, will you actually consider our grievances surrounding these lines that were once drawn up unjustly and make adjustments that don’t simply aim to allow those in power stay in power?

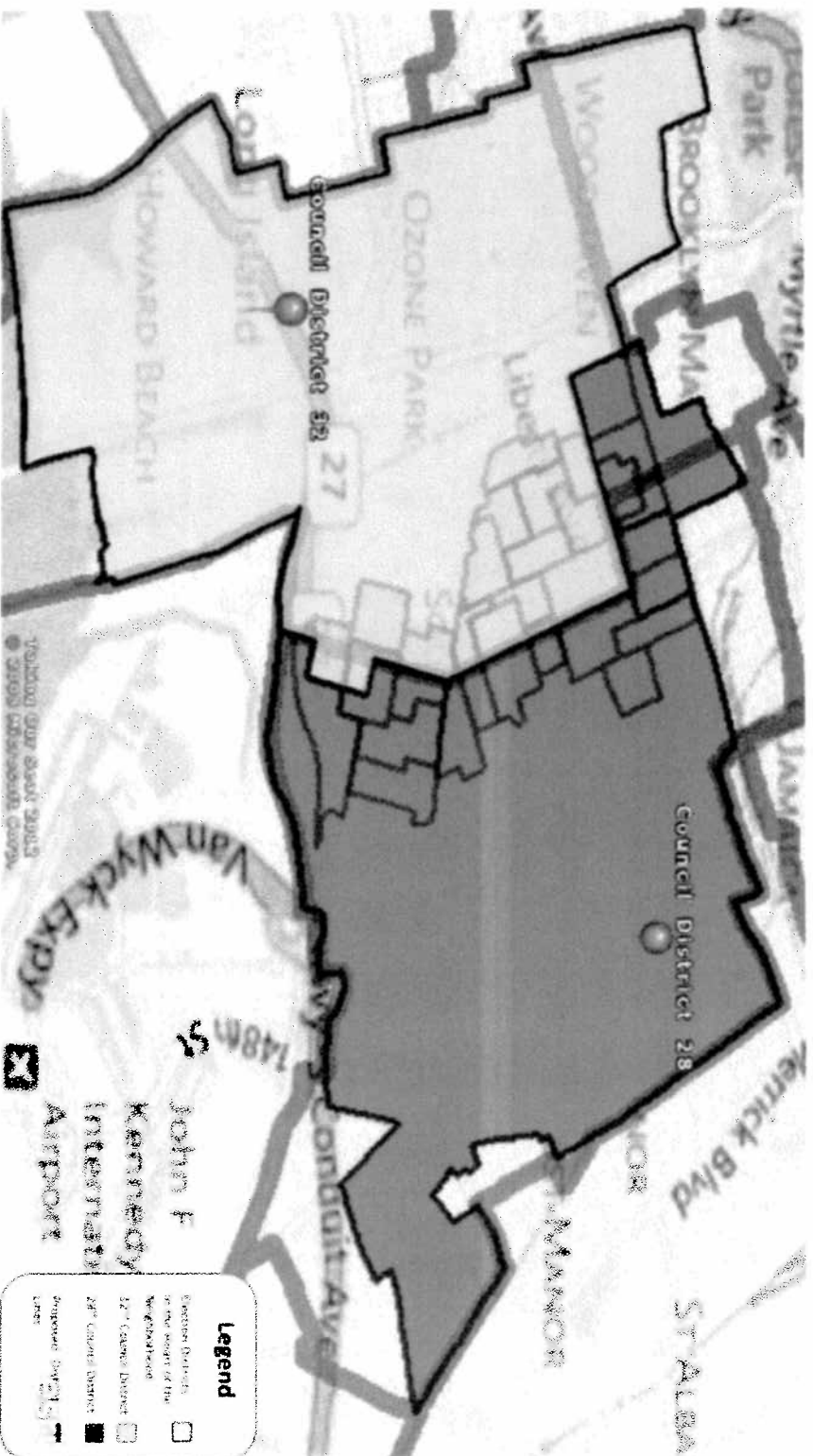
As I close, it is my hope that you will recognize my community of interest by going back to the drawing board. Serve democracy by readjusting those unjust lines.

Aminta Kilawan
South Ozone Park, Queens Resident
E-mail: [REDACTED]
Phone Number: [REDACTED]

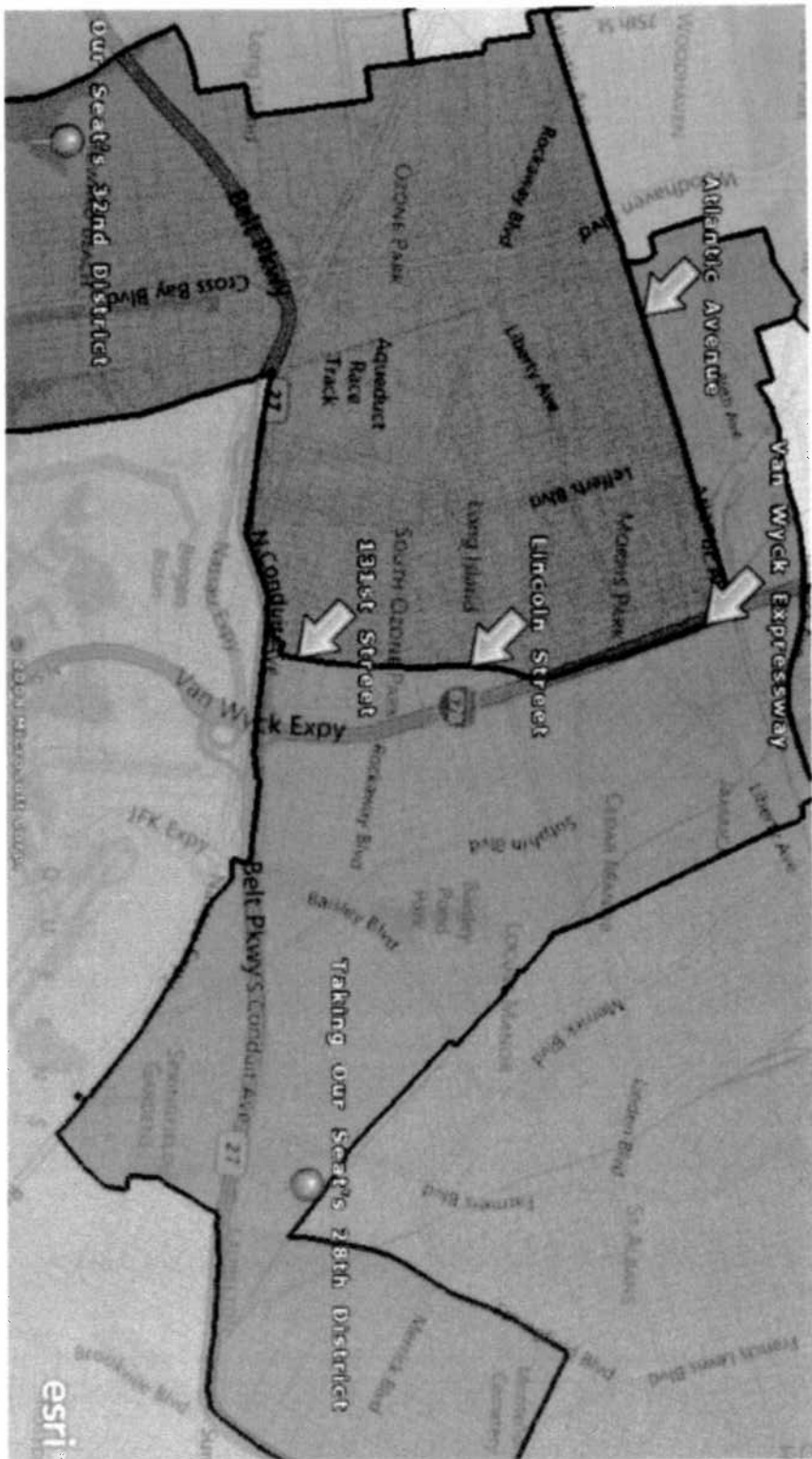
Current District Lines Split the Neighborhood

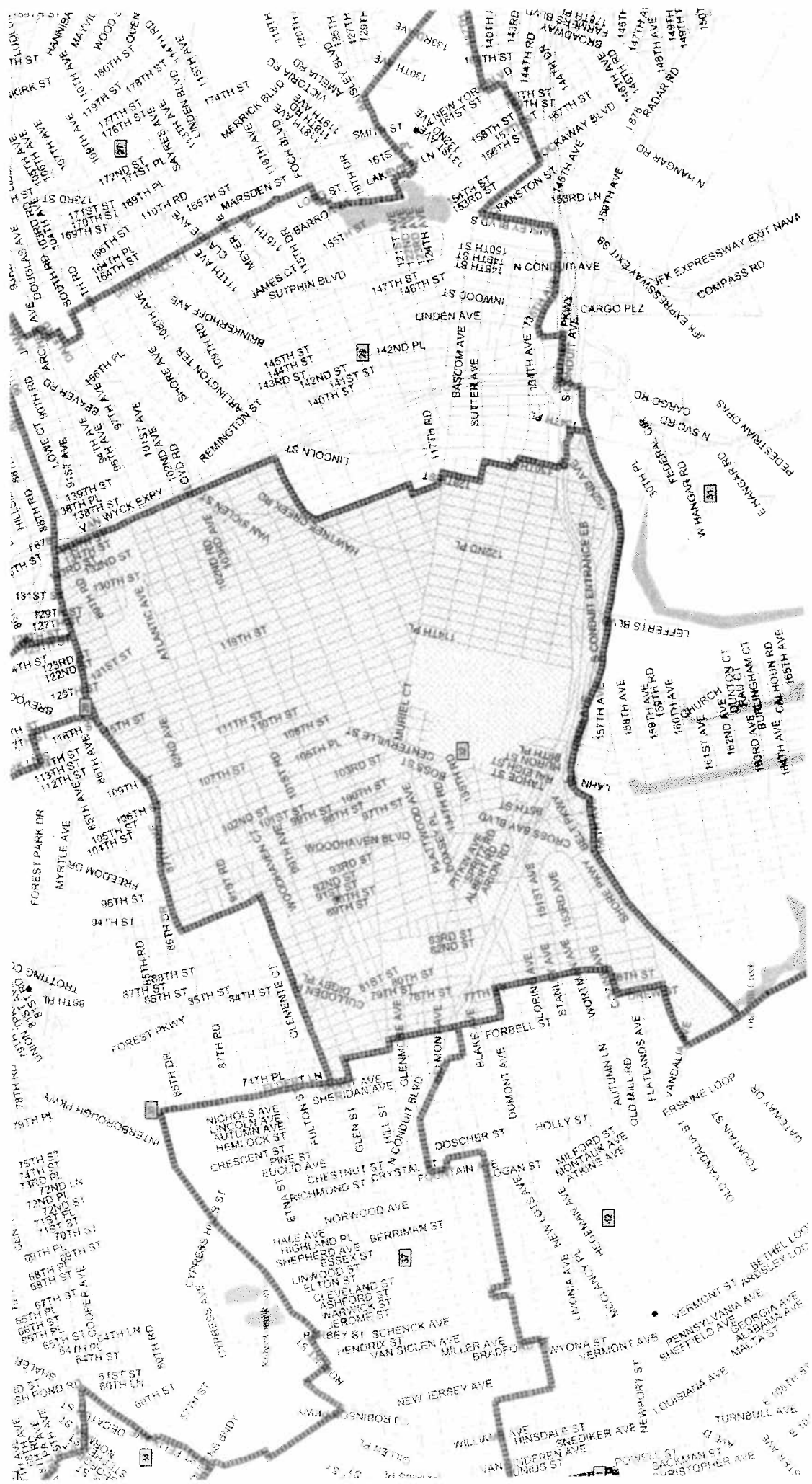


Proposed District Lines Continue to Split the Neighborhood



Taking Our Seat's Proposed Map for Dist 28 & Dist 32





DARREL SUKHDEO

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Chairperson, council members and all, good afternoon. I am Darrel Sukhdeo, a Community Activist representing South Queens and the South Asian and Asian voters. I speak on behalf of several organizations that have worked tirelessly to bring out the vote and register voters. By a conservative estimate we reach 60,000 residents of South Queens, particularly Richmond Hill and South Ozone Park. We also reach about 200,000 of all South Asians in NYC. To name a few of the groups I work with include the Rajkumari Center, AALDEF, Sakhi for South Asian Women, the Indo-Caribbean Alliance, the RHEDC, The American Cancer Society-Eastern Division and the National Cancer Action Network, the Asian American/Asian Research Institute of CUNY, the South Asian Journalists Association, among a few more. Don't take my word for it, reach out to them and they will confirm my many years of continuous service.

Since 1998 I have worked long and hard to bring out the vote and advocate for a single district for Richmond Hill / South Ozone Park. Along the way helping many politicians but despite a multitude of promises no effort has been made to help this community. And it seems, once again, that we have been disregarded and disenfranchised. As a so called "model minority" we earn more and pay more taxes than the average NYC household. We have hired more employees across most industries in NYC and lead all employers in the tech sector. Yet we do not have a single South Asian on the NYC council because of the legacy of dividing our vote and an agenda by many to disenfranchise our community. Are you, the members of this committee, part of that legacy? It seems from your proposed map that you intent to perpetuate this not so hidden policy of deliberate disenfranchisement!

THIS TIME I am asking 200,000 plus nyc residents NOT to give Money to political parties and only to give to South Asian and Asian candidates directly. Not to believe promises since they have All proven to be empty. And, to send a message that its not okay to continue with this castigation by withholding all funding to political parties.

You have received our proposed maps, and particularly the new proposed district for Richmond Hill/South ozone Park, which at the very least would give us the opportunity to proffer a candidate for a seat in the NYC city council. We are a significant part of the fabric of NYC, not just a model minority Salaries, Math and Science, but in civic engagement, political Activism and policy, we continue to make massive impacts on NYC, it is more than past time we have fair district lines. I am calling on each of you to help us and I promise, that I will ask our community to contribute to your next campaigns.

Thank you for coming to Queens.

First let me say thanks for providing me this opportunity to talk about the needs of the South Asian and Indo – Caribbean community residing in Richmond Hill, South Richmond Hill, Ozone Park and South Ozone Park neighborhood.

There are other neighborhoods which has substantial population of South Asians and Indo Caribbean like:

- Briarwood and Jamaica Hills.
- Jackson Heights and Elmhurst.
- Bellerose and Queens Village
- Floral Park and Glen Oaks.
- Astoria and Long Island City.

Besides these areas, there is also a great proportion of South Asian Population on the border of Queens and Brooklyn, just west of Woodhaven Blvd. I am not attaching any appendixes to my testimony as that is being done by other organizations like Taking Our Seat and AALDEF.

But I am here today to talk about Richmond Hill, South Richmond Hill, Ozone Park and South Ozone Park neighborhood only.

My name is Harpreet Singh Toor and at present I am chairman of Public Policy and External Affairs of the Sikh Cultural Society located at 9530 118th Street, South Richmond Hill. I have lived and or served in this community since 1983 when I established my first residence in New York City. Since then I have served in various capacities at the Sikh Cultural Society including as President and Chairman of Board of Trust at various times. I also testified at the April 2012 hearing for redistricting.

To give a bit of background on the Sikh Cultural Society, it was established in 1965 and bought an abandoned Methodist church in 1972. The church was originally constructed in 1896. The current membership of the society is more than 4,000 (four thousands). The society serves more than 15,000 worshippers and close to 3500 people come on any given week. The society being the biggest and largest on the east coast has always served as spokesperson and torch bearer for the Punjabi community in general and Sikh community in particular.

There are now more than half dozen Gurdwaras (Sikh Temple) besides same number of Mandirs and Mosques including churches located in Richmond Hill, South Richmond Hill, Ozone Park and South Ozone Park which serve the needs of new and emerging communities.

The shops have come up during last 20 or so years to serve the needs of South Asian and Indo Caribbean communities between Woodhaven Blvd and VanWyck Expressway on Rockaway Blvd, Liberty Ave and Atlantic Ave.

The neighborhoods have changed from being Italians and African American dominated to South Asian (Punjabi, Bengali) and Indo Caribbean population. There has been a substantial population of Latin Americans too residing in these areas of interest.

I ran for City Council seat in Council District 28 in 2010 special election to bring the attention to the community which is being neglected or by passed from various services.

Whether those are related to Education, Transportation, Jobs, Health care, Senior Centers, Libraries, Youth Programs or any other needs of the communities. I definitely can go on and on but because of time constraints will divulge into a few of them.

The schools are over populated and hence the drop rate is high for lack of proper facilities as compared to other competitive schools of the city. The parents are frustrated but feel helpless as they do not see any avenues which will or can address their grievances.

The A trains terminates at Liberty Avenue and Lefferts Blvd. During rush hours the trains are overcrowded even before they leave the Lefferts Blvd station. The number of trains to Lefferts Blvd has been reduced since the opening of the Resorts World Casino on Rockaway Blvd and increased to cater to the Casino clientele. We do not have any objection to the increase in the number of trains but why reduce to Lefferts Blvd? Because there is no one who can speak on our behalf at appropriate forums. In other words, we do not have any one who is watching our interests and taking a stand for us.

In the initial proposal, as it appears, that the Richmond Hill, South Richmond Hill, Ozone Park and South Ozone Park is divided into two and not four councilmanic districts as it was till now. But that actually hides the fact is that the areas taken out and or merged or brought together have a negligible or no affects at all as the said population of interest is still divided by Lefferts Blvd, which runs through the heart of these communities of interest.

We are not asking to give us a majority South Asian district by gerrymandering other districts. What we are asking is a just and equal status for these communities by leaving the neighborhood with common characteristics together. The dividing line between 28th and 32nd districts should be moved from Lefferts Blvd to VanWyck Expressway which is a more natural divide than the present which is being proposed.

Again, I thank you all for putting in all these efforts to bring the communities of interest together so that what has been denied to the communities so far will not happen in the coming years ahead.

Hearings

From: McCleary, Helen <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Wednesday, October 10, 2012 5:36 AM
To: Hearings
Subject: Why is Richmond Hill being turned into chopped liver?

Dear Sir or Madam,

I have lived in Richmond Hill my entire life. Services have gotten worse and worse as we have been carved up and given to different districts to which we have had little in common—most especially geographic contiguousness. The latest two proposals I have seen continue to divide my community into little pieces that make no sense. We are a demographically diverse community of working class stiff and we deserve to be treated as a community.

Thank you.

Helen McCleary

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KRIS GOUNDEN, COMMUNITY ACTIVIST:

Good afternoon and gentlemen. I would like to thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak.

My testimony is basically when it does not work, when the redistricting does not work. And Ozone Park, Richmond Hill is a community that my family has been in since 1976. And we have been victims of redistricting that did not work. The Caribbean, West Indian community has grown in Ozone Park/ Richmond Hill through our will to live together. Because of the shape of the voting district, we cannot vote to elect someone who is born of us. We cannot vote for someone who is more likely to speak of our interests. The voting district was a whole before we became a community. This redistricting is intentional to divide and weaken us.

The schools in our community act like we have no history and no voice in the City Council to demand that our past be included in our curriculum so that we can have pride and self-respect. This is what school is supposed to be about; self-esteem, self-respect, self-confidence. It is just not other people's history that makes them feel good about themselves. We deserve to feel good about ourselves too. Right now, part of my property has been taken without compensation. Former City Councilman of Howard Beach, Joseph Addabbo, (now state senator) lead the land grab-there was no easement on my property on an official map as required by law.

There was no hearing on the taking of my property as required by law. There was no notice on the taking of my property as required by law. Eminent Domain Law §208 was never complied with and these local politicians and the judges act like the Law does not have to be complied with when it comes to the Caribbean community.

I took my case to Court. Michael Divernio, a City employee, got up on the witness stand and admitted to the Court; admitted to the City; admitted to all of you that he had no knowledge of the facts of an Affidavit that he signed. That is perjury. Federal Judge Cogan did absolutely nothing about the perjury. The City did nothing about the perjury. The now State Senator, Joe Addabbo, did nothing about that. The current City Councilman, Eric Ulrich did nothing about the land-grab on my property. This is what had been done to the American Indians, now it is being done to the West Indians. And if we do not get some representation that we can trust, it is going to keep happening. We need districting that allows us a voice in the machine. Where is our voice to speak out on the conspiracy between the Judges and those outside of our community?

Our voice is in the redistricting of the voting lines. Our voice is ourselves.

We need to select our own Councilman who can represent us when our home is under attack, when we are harassed, abused, tortured by politicians; City agencies without repercussions. We have no way to address our concerns other than doing a lawsuit. The police do their job as per community meetings, which

we are not part of. The District Attorney rubber stamps the behavior of which the Judges have zero tolerance attitudes for our people. We have lived on this reservation-type neighborhood to the point that we self-deport ourselves to other U.S. States and other countries. We come together on the Internet to share our experiences of the discrimination by the ruling class that is presented during the John Gotti crime spree that goes back before JFK Airport was idle wild Airport. NYPD 106, Howard Beach Precinct disbanded for assisting these individuals. Politicians are profiting from their relationships with these activities; politicians, criminals, police within blocks of each other, co-existing with each other all of the same color and kind.

The Federal Government had to come in and stop this blatant abuse of Civil Human Rights to the minority community here in Richmond Hill and Ozone Park. We have been victims of this for much too long of this abuse. Our community needs representation. Our voice is falling on deaf ears without political presence. Our children need to be empowered to see a future here instead of elsewhere. Our people have been bled of our aspirations with the ongoing barrage of ticketing, Summons, violations; and disciplinary action the City wants to impose on us selectively. This system only hurts us when this system is supposed to help us and protect us. Police have memory problems and refuse to enforce the Law. The City refused to produce foiled documents and create damaging paperwork. The District Attorney sleeps on our cases and moves quickly to punish us. We have meetings with Borough President

Helen Marshall with results that just got worse. It is blatant without representation.

We are professional people. We are law abiding citizens. We are honest hardworking people, but we see not fruits of our labor. And this is passionate because it has taken everything that I ever worked for this. It is being made into a documentary, and you will see that in Holding Out for Justice; the named it Holding Out for Justice. That is all I want is justice. All I have asked for is equal treatment. Equal treatment, that is all that I have asked for. That is all everyone here has ever asked for is that you keep the lines so that we can be productive individuals, not leave the country and say how bad it was here. We are the type of people from the Caribbean; wherever we go we will survive.

In closing let me just give you an eample about the double standards family's such as mine endure. On june 12,2012, a neighbor Scott Statland, who has repeatedly called police on frivolous and false allegations against me and my family, confronted me when I was driving with my son who was then five years old. He pushed me and cursed at me and my son and preposterously claimed my son must be stealing his letters from his mailbox. Knowing his history of harassing my family, with the cooperation of the police from the 106 precinct, I videotaped the incident. Afterwards, I called the police who took no action against Statland. Instead, Statland accused me of assaulting him. The police, without even getting my side of the story, or viewing the videotape, arrested me. A judge granted an order of protection to statland, when in fact I was the victim. Now, as a result, I face a court trial and since even my legal aid

attorney is not interested in my side of the story and has viewed my video tape,
I could be convicted on these false charges.

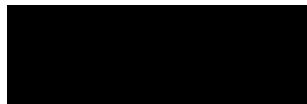
As a result of this harassment, my beloved wife suffered a miscarriage last week. Who will take care of my wife and children? What kind of justice is this? Is this really the American Dream or American Nightmare? I hope there is someone here today who will help me EXPOSE these injustices. I will be happy to provide the video of the incident with Statland to any of the relevant law enforcement agencies apart from the 106 precinct to properly investigate this injustice against me and my family.

Thank you,

Kris Gounden

Community activist

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LEELA MARET

Testimony for city Council Redistricting.

My name is Leela Maret. I was the Recording Secretary of Local 375, DC 37 for 10 years and the delegate to DC 37 largest Municipal union in the city representing 125,000 members. The city Employees nurses, Cross guards, Engineers, Clerks, Teachers, Police officers, Fire Fighters make the city work day by day. I am a community activist and Vice President of Federation of Indian Association Of North America and Canada and I live in Richmond Hill for the last 25 years.

Richmond Hill, South Ozone Park Community of interest continues to be divided by 4 city Councils. It is a continuous area of people of common interests, culture, and heritage. This Community is disenfranchised, chopped up and fragmented. Punjabis, Indo Caribbians, Bangladeshis are a group of same origin and background. We also congregate in the same places of worship. Heavily populated mandirs Mosques and Gurudwaras are dispersed. The children go to same high Schools John Adams and Richmond Hill, share common Country of Origin, dialect and language. We have opened up small businesses in Richmond Hill that reflect our Culture. We run Countless Roti shops and we have countless ethnic Garment stores in the area. We have Local newspapers West Indian, Caribbean New Yorker, Indian panorama And host radio programs to the needs of our community and share community services and organizations. We identify as Americans who can trace our ancestry back to South Asian Diaspora. We did not have health clinics, Community centers, daycare centers, Senior centers, social service centers, or even job training center in our Area.

The Most important family Policy, urban Policy, foreign policy

Labor policy to have and ensure representation by all people. We are a vital part of the economic engine of New York. We are asking for the opportunity to become part of the mechanism in America. We humbly request to Show us some respect and keep us together in one district. We do not have any South Asian elected so far to the city Council. We would like to have a Piece of pie too. We are one of the fastest growing ethnic population. Richmond Hill and South Ozone Park Community should be kept as one district as it functions as one neighborhood. It should be unified into one Community that must be kept together and not splintered.

Within each community throughout the city is a vibrancy civic historic cultural richness of many diverse groups that deserve to be preserved through political empowerment. The proposed district lines still continue to split the neighborhood. We strongly emphasize to redraw the district with Atlantic Avenue, Conduit, Van Wyck and city line as its boundaries. The proposed map is attached for consideration.

My heartfelt Thanks to the commission for consideration