

**Written Testimony for the
New York City Districting Commission**

Aneesah Shah, Youth Leader, Indo-Caribbean Alliance, Inc.
Public Hearing at Flushing Library, 41-17 Main Street, Flushing, NY 11355
August 21st, 2012

Good Afternoon Commission Members and concerned residents of Queens,

My name is Aneesah Shah. I am 16 years old and I live with parents and my older sister in South Ozone Park. In the fall, I will also be a senior at Richmond Hill High School where I am an honors student. I am involved in several extra-curricular programs at my school and in my community. At school, I am the Vice President of the prestigious Key Club International chapter and in my community I am a Youth Leader with the Indo-Caribbean Alliance, a local non-profit organization.

I have always thought of my immediate neighborhood to include where I live, where I go to school, where I go grocery shopping with my family or where we go to pray together. What I did not know is that each of these is in a separate City Council District. This has certainly contributed to some of the poorest local governance we see anywhere in New York City.

When older people in the neighborhood find out about this, they quickly compare it to some of the political situations they faced in Guyana. They say this was a big part of the reason they left and came here in the first place.

I don't think they're right, but I'm having a hard time proving them wrong. For example, while I am an honors student, less than 50% of the students at Richmond Hill High School actually graduate. They're not very different from me –most of the students there or their parents are from Guyana or from South Asia. They live in Richmond Hill, Ozone Park or South Ozone Park. This is the case for John Adams High School and even some of the junior high schools in the area. The model minority myth that Asians do well in school is even less true in this part of Queens. What's different here?

In this entire area of over 100,000 residents, there is a single community center. And while I have some friends who go to the South Queens Boys & Girls Club, most students and families from immigrant communities have never heard of it. Even if they did, it could not accommodate us all. While we have lots of places to worship, ethnic food stores and dozens of family members close by, we have nowhere to go for assistance with homework, we have nowhere to go afterschool or on weekends and we usually have to leave the neighborhood to find anything useful to do with our time.

You can help with this. The parents from my school should not have to go to two or more Council Members to deal with issues at the local school –like when both of our major high schools were proposed for closure. We need a district where the elected official will be from this neighborhood and who will work with the community on our

needs, such as a space for students to go after school –for most high school students in the neighborhood, afterschool starts at 1pm because of overcrowding.

We need work together with residents in Richmond Hill, Ozone Park, and South Ozone Park to make our City Council more fair and reflective of the needs of our community. I strongly urge you to keep these neighborhoods together in a single district.

Thank you.