



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

Richard S. David, Executive Director, Indo-Caribbean Alliance, Inc.
Public Hearing at Flushing Library, 41-17 Main Street, Flushing, NY 11355
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Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony. My name is Richard S. David and I am the Executive Director of the Indo-Caribbean Alliance, Inc. (ICA).

ICA is a nonpartisan non-profit 501(c)(3) organization that serves the Indo-Caribbean and South Asian, or collectively the South Asian American (SAA), community. The SAA community includes residents from Guyana, Trinidad & Tobago, India, Bangladesh and other Caribbean and South Asian nations, who trace their ancestral history to South Asia. ICA provides civic advocacy as well as youth development, cultural and community building programs to residents in Richmond Hill, Ozone Park and South Ozone Park neighborhoods in Southern Queens, New York.

We ask that the Districting Commission keep these neighborhoods whole and together when considering the electoral boundaries for City Council.

ICA provides programs and services to meet their needs of our constituents. One of our strongest programs is our holistic Youth Development Program which helps young people lay the groundwork for future success by helping them to develop job skills, increase academic performance and improve their social skills under the guidance of mentors and program administrators. The majority of students and families in this program are SAA's and recent immigrants. The program is needed because the public high schools in our neighborhood, namely Richmond Hill High School and John Adams High School, are failing to properly integrate and educate these students.

In 2010, a joint report by the New York State Education Department and the New York City Department of Education (see Exhibit A) identified the need to "assist staff in revising the curriculum to incorporate multicultural issues and concepts in the curriculum" to address the disconnect between students, parents and the community. ICA is part of a coalition working on an initiative to introduce SAA history and culture into the public school curriculum and a bill to this effect was introduced in the New York

State Assembly in 2011, Bill No. A08126. The report also noted that 33% of the students were Asian, mostly SAA's. Many of our students are now returning to school after one or two years of irregular attendance, others volunteer as afterschool tutors and parents are now getting more involved. Keeping the SAA community together would help to address the education and youth development issues at Richmond Hill High School and John Adams High School by helping us to target our programs to maximize its social impact.

We also find that many of our residents, especially recent immigrants, are not aware of the health care programs, tenant/home owners' rights and their legal rights. To address this, we have worked with the local Police Departments, Community Boards and Government Agencies. We have even sponsored streets fairs, conferences and workshops to empower our residents to address these imbalances. However, a major barrier to serving our community has been the electoral lines that require massive coordination between elected officials to ensure permits are issues, address quality of life issues and ensure that services are provided and available within the community.

For Census 2010, ICA took on a large scale volunteer, public awareness and education campaign to increase the response rate from the dismal performance in 2000. We enlisted and trained college and high school students who formed teams to cover nearly 100 blocks in South Queens. We also created ad campaigns, using both print and digital media. We held rallies, town hall meetings and collaborated with numerous stakeholders. One of the major issues in the campaign was ethnic identity. Many SAA's, particularly Indo-Caribbeans, do not ethnically identify themselves with the options available on the Census forms. Residents were skeptical about completing the forms due to their immigration status, people complained that their elected officials were not addressing the lack of affordable housing in the area which has contributed to basement dwellings, and some just needed to have the information reinforced by a source they trusted. Although we are confident we increased the count by several thousands, we also know that thousands of our constituents were not counted. We believe that far more SAA's live in South Queens than Census 2010 reported.

The economic hub of the SAA community in South Queens consists of the Liberty Avenue commercial strip between the Van Wyck Expressway and Woodhaven Boulevard. The strip is filled with roti shops, sari boutiques and many professional services run by SAA's. The neighborhood has even earned the nickname "Little Guyana" for its sheer volume of ethnic stores. Based on a 2010 study sponsored by the New York City Department of Small Business Services and the Richmond Hill Economic Development Council, the area consists of 29% Asians using a 1 mile radius from the Liberty Avenue commercial strip and incomes stood at \$65,991 and are expected to grow to \$69,000 by 2014 (see Exhibit B). The neighborhood is artificially divided by electoral lines along Lefferts Boulevard, which divides the economic strip our residents depend on and hinders our ability to efficiently serve these residents.

These neighborhoods host some of the largest gatherings of SAA's in North America, including the largest Phagwah Parade (Holi) which attracts nearly 35,000 participants,

the Diwali Motorcade which attracts 15,000 participants and other significant conferences and cultural events. The neighborhood is home to several SAA-led non-profit organizations including the Rajkumarie Cultural Center and the Jahajee Sisters. It is also home to dozens of mosques, temples and more recently, gurdwaras.

Our recommendation

The SAA community residing in Ozone Park, South Ozone Park, Richmond Hill bounded by the Van Wyck Expressway to the East , City Line/Brooklyn County boarder to the West and Hillside Avenue to the North and Conduit to the South. We support the proposed map for the area presented by the Asian American Community Coalition on Redistricting and Democracy (ACCORD) and the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (ALDEF).

These neighborhoods must be kept together in any district map if these residents are to receive a quality education, if they are to be integrated and be productive, responsible citizens of the great City of New York.

Thank you.

