



Testimony of Steven Choi, MinKwon Center for Community Action, to the City of New York 2012-2013 Redistricting Commission

City of New York 2012-2013 Redistricting Commission Public Hearing, August 21st, 2012
Flushing Library
41-17 Main St, Flushing, NY 11355

Good afternoon. My name is Steven Choi, and I am the Executive Director of the MinKwon Center for Community Action. I'm here to discuss our interest in the redrawing of City Council districts by this Commission.

Since our founding in 1984, the MinKwon Center has had a profound presence in the Korean American, Asian American, and other marginalized communities. We are based in the heart of Flushing, and our goals are to educate and organize our community members, including the Korean American community; to provide critically-needed services; to increase Korean American civic participation; to build youth leadership; and to preserve our cultural roots.

1. The MinKwon Center's Engagement in Civic Participation

The MinKwon Center is committed to increasing civic engagement of our communities.

Many Korean American voters are disenfranchised. Our community's voters are confused by complicated procedures, denied in-language materials, and unlawfully harassed at the polls. So the MinKwon Center works to empower voters from the start of the electoral process to the finish – registering voters, educating them, mobilizing them to vote, and then protecting them at the polls. We are completely non-partisan and independent of any politicians or parties. Our goal is to help our communities build power, have a strong voice on community issues, and then hold elected officials accountable.

2. The Importance of Redistricting for our Communities

We believe that redistricting is a critical civic engagement issue.

In previous years, districts have not followed natural community boundaries, were only drawn to help incumbents, and have diluted the votes of minorities. But if districts are drawn properly – that take into account natural communities of interest, respect the Voting Rights Act, and adhere to the principle of one person, one vote – then we are rewarded with competitive elections, accountable politicians, and the protection of disenfranchised minorities. This is critical for the Asian American community, which has grown by more than 30% since 2000 and is by far the fastest-growing major racial group in New York. 19 City Councilmembers have districts where Asian Americans make up more than 15% of their constituents, yet many of these City Councilmembers are unaware of their needs and concerns.

In addition, this Commission must engage the community in a robust public debate. Yet we have not seen enough efforts to publicize these hearings in our communities, nor provide translated

documents and interpreters – language access that is legally required by the Civil Rights Act and the Mayor’s Executive Order 120.

3. MinKwon Center’s Recommendations for Flushing and Bayside

The MinKwon Center is committed to working with ACCORD, the Asian American Community Coalition on Redistricting and Democracy, to educate our community members, engage them, and advocate for our communities’ interests.

Our recommendations today relate to the Flushing and Bayside communities, and neighborhood boundaries that we worked on together with the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund. For Flushing, we recognize that this community as bordered on the west by the Van Wyck Expressway, the north by 32nd Avenue and 27th Avenue, the east by Utopia Parkway and 189th Street, and the south by the Long Island Expressway, represents a true community of interest. Flushing residents share many common characteristics – as the majority are immigrants, mostly from Asia, for whom language access is a key issue. This community has become one of the largest immigrant gateways in New York City.

Bayside, as we define it as bordered on the west by the Clearview Expressway, the north by 33rd Avenue and 33rd Road, the east by the Cross Island Parkway, and the south by 73rd Avenue, is also another community of interest. The greater Bayside area is home to a large, growing Korean and Asian American community, and we believe that this specifically includes the Oakland Gardens neighborhood as part of this community.

Together with our ACCORD coalition partners, we will continue to advocate for our communities throughout the entire redistricting process, to ensure that our communities are heard and that our political rights are protected. Thank you.