



## STATEMENT OF OCA-NY

### Written Statement for the Redistricting Commission of the City Council

By Dr. Wah Lee

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My name is Dr. Wah Lee. I am testifying on behalf of OCA-NY. I have been a Board Member of OCA-NY since 2010. OCA-NY is a founding member of ACCORD. Founded in 1976, OCA-NY, formerly known as Organization for Chinese Americans, is a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to protecting and advancing the political, economic, social, and cultural rights of Asian Americans. OCA-NY represents the five boroughs of New York City. Our work in Brooklyn includes voter registration at citizenship swearing in ceremonies at the Federal Courthouse and in Sunset Park, taking victims of hate crimes to the Kings County District Attorney's office, and participating in Asian American heritage festivals in McKinley Park. In 2010, we co-sponsored a successful census event at Sunset Park Recreation Center. We've partnered with United Puerto Rican Organization of Sunset Park, Brooklyn's Chinese American Planning Council, Chinese Brooklyn Association, and United Chinese Association of Brooklyn on OCA-NY's hate crimes prevention art project and the 2010 census. OCA-NY has served on the Brooklyn Borough President's Committee to celebrate Asian American Heritage Month and has received awards from Kings County District Attorney Charles Hynes, the Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz, and Brooklyn State Senator Eric Adams.

My statement focuses on the communities of Sunset Park, Bensonhurst, and the neighborhood between those communities. Support for my statement is based on other OCA-NY Brooklyn members, data from the 2005-2009 American Community Survey, 2010 Census, and my personal and work experience. I am 40 years old. I grew up in Bensonhurst where I worked in my parents' dry cleaner and attended PS 247. I completed my medical internship in Sunset Park's Lutheran Medical Center, where I am still affiliated as a physician.

I have witnessed my neighbors, the local restaurants, storefronts, and the community centers change within the past 10 years. Just around the corner from my home, a local diner became a Chinese restaurant named Fu Kee. The 86th Street Jewish Deli became a Chinese restaurant named 86 Wong, and more than three Asian style grocery stores opened. Also, the sharp rise in Asian patronage resulted in the Brooklyn Federation of Italian-American Organizations to offer immigration assistance, and the Bensonhurst Jewish Community Center to hire Chinese-English bilingual case managers.

The 2010 Census revealed Asian Americans now comprise 13% of New York City's population. The number of Asian Americans has reached a million, with over a quarter million in Brooklyn alone. We urge the City Council to keep communities of interest in Brooklyn that contain a high concentration of Asian Americans together. The Asian American population in Brooklyn grew by 41% since 2000; linking Sunset Park with Bensonhurst underscores the pattern of growth of the Asian American community in Brooklyn.



OCA-NY supports a City Council District that contains parts of Bensonhurst and Sunset Park linked by a similar community of common interest living approximately between 60th and 71st Streets. These three localities have shared economic ties, resources, and social networks.

2010 census data shows Sunset Park is 35% Asian and Bensonhurst is 37% Asian. The American Community Survey (2005-2009) shows 80% of Chinese speakers in Sunset Park speak English less than very well, similar to 61% in Bensonhurst. Brooklyn Asian Voice Organization, based in Sunset Park, conducts regular "clean-up" efforts in Bensonhurst. Asian Community United Society, based in Bensonhurst, often does community outreach in Sunset Park. Libraries in both neighborhoods have programs that specifically cater to Brooklyn's Asian residents. Asians in Sunset Park and Bensonhurst, usually go to Lutheran Medical Center in Sunset Park, especially after Victor Memorial Hospital in Bay Ridge shut down. I have attended weddings of Bensonhurst friends in Sunset Park because Chinese restaurants in Sunset Park are larger and more established.

The Asian plurality community approximately between 60th & 71st Streets links the Asian neighborhoods of Sunset Park and Bensonhurst and caters to both of them. For instance, when I organized funeral services for my father-in-law, we chose the funeral home Ralph Aievoli and Son Inc., located on 65<sup>th</sup> Street, for the geographic convenience of my in-laws' family who are scattered throughout Sunset Park and Bensonhurst. This business recognized the changing demographics of these interconnected neighborhoods: they have hired Chinese-speaking staff and offer funeral services in Chinese. My neighbor, who is Chinese-American and has lived in Bensonhurst all his life, also used this funeral home on 65th Street when his father passed away.

Both Sunset Park and Bensonhurst face the same problems. I have personally treated 3 victims of violence and harassment in Sunset Park who were Asian. I myself have been targeted for racially motivated harassment in both neighborhoods. The two areas have their share of rampant graffiti and littering. Additionally, one of the most pressing problems is the unavailability of low-cost access to language instruction. Although I was born in America, the language I speak at work is Chinese because many of my patients who are from Sunset Park, Bensonhurst, and the Asian plurality community approximately between 60th & 71st Streets speak English "less than well."

OCA-NY proposes that the Asian population in Sunset Park be linked by the Asian plurality community approximately between 60th and 71st Streets, to the Asian population in Bensonhurst. These populations have similar social needs and have much in common other than race. These three communities, while geographically contiguous, are currently divided by multiple districts. These three communities have similar needs regarding bilingual access to healthcare, quality of ESL options in public education, transportation to employment opportunities, culturally competent services, and hate crimes prevention. State Assembly District 49 recognizes the communities of common interest in Sunset Park and the Asian plurality community approximately between 60th and 71st Streets which extends to Bensonhurst. State Assembly District 47 recognizes and keeps intact the community of common interest in Bensonhurst. Since City Council Districts are larger than State Assembly Districts, a City Council District encompassing the Asian plurality communities in Sunset Park and Bensonhurst linked by the Asian plurality community approximately between 60th and 71st Streets should be created. Thank you.