



Arab American Association of New York

Testimony for the NYC Districting Commission

August 15, 2022

Thank you to the NYC Districting Commission for organizing this second series of public hearings.

My name is Salma Allam, and I am the Coalition Organizer of the Arab American Association of New York, a services and advocacy organization rooted in the Bay Ridge Arab community. As a member of the New York Immigration Coalition, AAANY is dedicated to ensuring fair representation for immigrants and communities of color across New York City.

Like any underserved population, New York's Arab and Muslim communities face many challenges: unemployment, lack of affordable housing, and issues of language access when interfacing with government offices, among others. These challenges are compounded by discrimination against Arabs and Muslims on both an individual and institutional level, which often prevents civic participation and threatens the fabric of the community. AAANY demonstrates its commitment to Brooklyn's Arab immigrant, refugee, and Muslim communities through our comprehensive service and advocacy programs. We provide a range of critical support services to over 7,000 participants annually, including women's empowerment and adult literacy programs, immigration legal assistance, mental health and domestic violence support services, and youth programming.

Fair districts are the foundation for fair representation. The opportunity to draw fair districts only comes once every 10 years. If we don't get this right, our communities will have to live with the consequences for the next decade. I am here today to express the need for South Brooklyn's Arab and Muslim immigrant communities to be kept together in one City Council district.

According to the most recent American Community Survey data, the neighborhood of Bay Ridge contains approximately 9,000 people of Arab ancestry, making it one of the largest Arab communities in NYC and throughout the US. Historically, our community was placed in an overwhelmingly white, politically conservative district, which resulted in our community's voting strength being diluted and in it being unable to elect candidates who share their experiences and who will prioritize their needs.

In February 2022, the State Legislature passed a transformative redistricting plan that was signed by the Governor. Under this plan, the Bay Ridge Arab community was placed in a district with nearby neighborhoods Sunset Park and the north Shore of Staten Island, both of which share key demographic characteristics with our own neighborhood, including a high immigrant and POC



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population. The most recent maps under consideration, however, split our community into multiple districts, further diminishing our voting power and virtually guaranteeing that our community will continue to face a lack of fair representation in electoral institutions.

I want to thank the commission for committing to an open process and for maintaining a website with information on the redistricting process, upcoming meetings, and submissions. Moving forward, I urge this commission to take a proactive role in engaging with community organizations and media that centers the stories of communities of color around the city.

Thank you again and thanks also to the many partners who are in this fight for fair maps and fair representation.