

**The United Communities Alliance for Fair Redistricting
106-11 Liberty Avenue
Richmond Hill, NY 11417**

December 3, 2021

To all members of the IRC:

You have a historic and privileged duty to serve over 20 million New York State residents in this landmark process. The future of our families and democracy, and overcoming decades of cronyism and special interests' stranglehold, lies in your hands. Our families have fought and died for and protected our great nation. We are entitled to our just share.

Fiat jūstitia ruat cælum. "Let justice be done though the heavens fall."

Incumbent politicians and special interests have been boasting that you are doomed, like the Titanic, that you are mere puppets on a string, actors in a dog and pony show.

They say you guys are just going through the motions, dooming yourselves to deadlock and ultimate failure, and that they will then step in and "save NY," whereas they will be drawing their own districts in the backrooms of Albany, in the notorious "3 men in a room style." Beware of these maneuvers!

Consequently, you will be made the scapegoats and publicly shamed if you fail to agree on 1 set of maps, especially since you will have betrayed over 20 million New Yorkers, including hundreds who attended your hearings all over the length and breadth of New York State, and braved and risked the pandemic, and \$4 million of our tax dollars will have been wantonly wasted.

This cannot end well for you, the IRC, but for these self-serving incumbents. And it should not! The public has been made aware of the blame game following your failure to agree.

Shame on all of you, if you allow yourselves to be used as pawns in this important process. See yourselves as worthy New Yorkers!

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/15/nyregion/redistricting-maps-ny.html>

“Republican commissioners wasted little time pointing fingers on Wednesday at their Democratic counterparts, whom they accused of cutting off talks in recent days that had been intended to try to reconcile the competing maps. Privately, the Republicans fear that Democratic commissioners have no intention of finding an agreement and would prefer to let the body fail so they can kick the process directly to the Legislature to draw more advantageous maps for their party.

The constitution is pretty clear in what we are supposed to do: They appointed the commission as an independent body for it to have to work together and find a nonpartisan way forward by actually discussing things,” Jack Martins, the commission’s Republican vice-chair, said in an interview. “The fact that a portion of the commission has decided to walk away from that is very disappointing.”

If you allow that to occur under your watch, untold injustice, pain and suffering will result. There will be enough blame for all of you-and some more! Don’t be duped by the corrupt interests who have failed us for decades, but want to come out unscathed, smelling like roses!

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/10/nyregion/redistricting-queens-asians-nyc.html>

There is overwhelming evidence from the countless religious, business and community leaders and organizations, who have ALL testified to keep South Ozone Park, Ozone Park and Richmond Hill as one community of Interest as the Redistricting Draft “AL Map” (Assembly District) confirms. Attached.

PLEASE KEEP THIS ASSEMBLY DISTRICT INTACT ACCORDINGLY IN ACCORDANCE WITH YOUR MANDATE, OATH AND DUTY.

There is also overwhelming evidence from the countless organizations, religious, business and community leaders who ALL testified to keep South Ozone Park, Ozone Park and Richmond Hill and to remove Howard Beach and Hamilton Beach from Draft Map P as one community of interest as the Redistricting Draft “P Map” (State Senate District) confirms. Attached.

PLEASE AMEND THIS STATE SENATE DISTRICT ACCORDINGLY IN ACCORDANCE WITH YOUR MANDATE, OATH AND DUTY.

Millions of people, not only in NY, but across America and the world, are depending on you to show that bipartisan commissions can deliver justice, fairness and equity, and rise above criminal narrow-mindedness.

We are all praying for and depending on you...

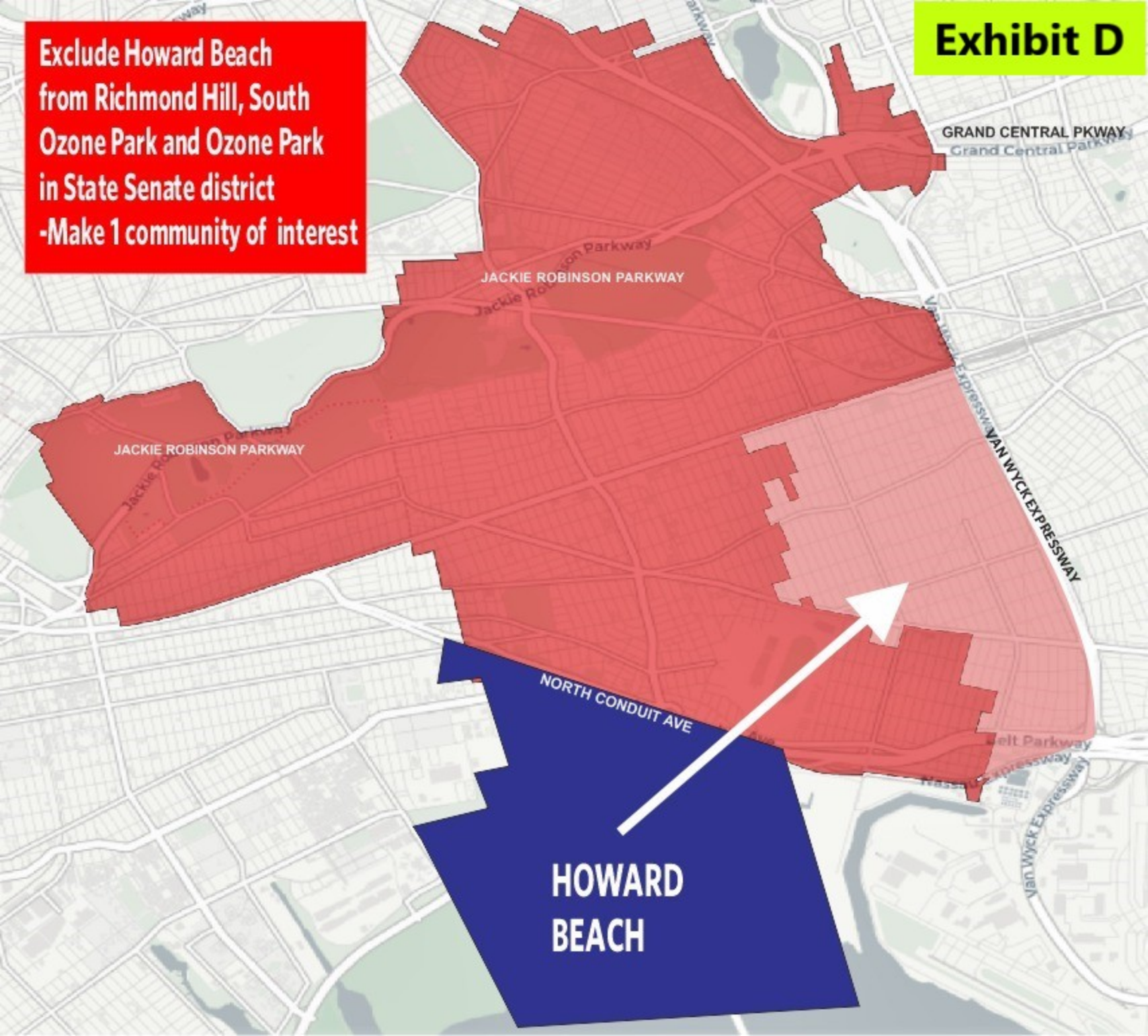
Albert Baldeo

**Assembly
District AL
accepted by
consensus**

Exhibit A



**Exclude Howard Beach
from Richmond Hill, South
Ozone Park and Ozone Park
in State Senate district
-Make 1 community of interest**



**HOWARD
BEACH**

2 Parties, 2 Maps: Democrats and Republicans Squabble on Redistricting

Two competing proposals advance, and the failure to compromise may pave the way for Democrats to step in and knock out Republican congressional seats.

By Nicholas Fandos and Grace Ashford

Published Sept. 15, 2021 Updated Nov. 10, 2021

New York's new bipartisan redistricting commission got off to an inauspicious start on Wednesday, as its Democratic and Republican members failed to reach an agreement on an initial set of congressional and legislative map proposals.

Instead, the New York State Independent Redistricting Commission, the body empowered by voters to remove politics from the mapmaking process, said it would proceed for now with two competing proposals, one drawn up by its Democratic members and another by Republicans.

With New York slated to lose a seat in its congressional delegation after last year's census, both parties proposed collapsing a district upstate, where the population has declined.

But the Republican plan would do so by rejiggering a handful of Hudson Valley and Capital Region districts that could pit Democratic incumbents against one another, while preserving the shapes of rural red seats in the western part of the state. Democrats propose the opposite, potentially displacing Republican incumbents in central and western New York while shoring up Hudson Valley Democratic incumbents.

Other vast differences were evident. While the Republicans would redraw lines across New York City, potentially imperiling several long-serving Democrats in Manhattan and Brooklyn, they would basically leave intact the Staten Island-based district now held by Nicole Malliotakis, a Republican.

Democrats, on the other hand, would leave city lines more intact, but redraw Ms. Malliotakis's seat to include Coney Island in Brooklyn, which is largely Democratic, a move that would make the district more competitive. Their map also appeared to create a new opportunity for Democrats on Long Island to pick up a seat.

Nothing in the New York State Constitution requires the commission, which is drawing lines for the first time since it was created in 2014, to agree to a single set of maps for congressional, Assembly and State Senate districts at this point in the process. But the partisan squabble over what amounts to a preliminary discussion does not spur optimism that the commission can unite around a single set of bipartisan maps to present to Albany for ratification.

Its failure could pave the way for Democratic supermajorities in Albany to step in to determine the final maps early next year. Party leaders there and in Washington are already quietly circling in case the commission cannot reach a final agreement or produce a final result party leaders like. They hope to use the process to knock out as many as five Republican congressional seats, boosting the party nationwide as it tries to maintain a narrow House majority, and to firm up permanent majorities in the Legislature.

Under the New York Constitution, the redistricting commission leads the way in drawing maps. But if it fails to come to a consensus among itself or delivers lawmakers a map that they don't like, the Legislature can overpower the body and establish almost any map it chooses, so long as the districts meet constitutional requirements and are roughly equal in size.

Republicans in New York and Albany are already balking at the process and could challenge the outcome in the courts, which drew the current congressional map in 2012 amid a partisan dispute in Albany.

Republican commissioners wasted little time pointing fingers on Wednesday at their Democratic counterparts, whom they accused of cutting off talks in recent days that had been intended to try to reconcile the competing maps. Privately, the Republicans fear that Democratic commissioners have no intention of finding an agreement and would prefer to let the body fail so they can kick the process directly to the Legislature to draw more advantageous maps for their party.

"The constitution is pretty clear in what we are supposed to do: They appointed the commission as an independent body for it to have to work together and find a nonpartisan way forward by actually discussing things," Jack Martins, the commission's Republican vice-chair, said in an interview. "The fact that a portion of the commission has decided to walk away from that is very disappointing."

Democrats argued that the competing maps could be a good thing, allowing voters to provide feedback as to which they liked best. Commissioners stressed that the presentation of two sets of maps Wednesday did not close the door on the possibility that they would eventually find consensus before their January deadline.

Understand How U.S. Redistricting Works

What is redistricting? It's the redrawing of the boundaries of congressional and state legislative districts. It happens every 10 years, after the census, to reflect changes in population.

“We could either draw these maps in a smoke-filled Zoom in 48 hours or we could put the maps out to the public and let the public weigh in,” said David Imamura, the Democratic appointee who chairs the panel. “In the interest of public participation, we decided to put both sets of maps out.”

Members of Congress in both parties largely withheld comment, though Ms. Malliotakis said she was not worried.

“Regardless of what the final configuration of the district is, I’m extremely confident I will be re-elected next year,” she said.

New York voters created the independent commission by constitutional amendment in 2014, but its contours were the product of a compromise between Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo and Republicans, who controlled the State Senate at the time. The idea was to take line drawing out of the hands of politicians in the Legislature eager to protect their party and their incumbents and give it, starting this year, to a bipartisan body that could fairly divide up the state.

But the commission struggled to assert its independence from the start, and critics say its structure — with most appointees designated by the party leaders in the Legislature — makes compromise exceedingly difficult.

The panel did not receive funding from Albany until April, forcing commissioners to volunteer their time for months. The Legislature, in contrast, has continued to fund its own map-drawing task force year after year.

The panel did not receive detailed census data until last month because of national delays; it is still waiting on official data on the state’s prison population that the commission needs to fine-tune its maps. And even as the commission prepared to release the maps, another hiccup emerged: Its website briefly crashed on Wednesday.

Split 7 Ways, Immigrant Neighborhood Seeks to Unify Its Political Power

As New York begins to draw new legislative districts, partisan fights may overshadow the electoral harm the process can do to some groups.



By Nicholas Fandos

Nov. 10, 2021

When Ejaz Nabie saw his congregation in Queens become ensnared in one of New York's worst Covid-19 outbreaks last winter, he did what any desperate community leader would do: He turned to his representative in state government for help.

For Mr. Nabie, the congregation's pastor, that meant trying seven of them.

The extraordinary outreach was not merely zealous, but a reflection of the surreal political geography of his Richmond Hill neighborhood and adjoining South Ozone Park. The south Queens area, whose residents are heavily Indo-Caribbean and Punjabi, is a prime example of the collateral damage caused by the way New York has historically drawn legislative boundaries.

Seven State Assembly districts slice through the few square miles around Mr. Nabie's Faith Assembly church — dividing blocks, congregations, even families. At several intersections, three out of four corners are split among different assembly members, leaving residents with no clear leader to turn to in state government.

"We should have one person who we could hold accountable," said Mr. Nabie, 61, recalling his struggle to secure masks and vaccine doses for his fellow immigrants from Guyana, Trinidad and elsewhere in the Caribbean. "Instead, I'm trying to hold seven persons accountable who are all evading me."

As New York begins the once-a-decade task of reshaping its congressional districts, the focus has mostly been on the kind of seismic clashes between Democrats and Republicans that help determine majorities in Washington and Albany.

But as Mr. Nabie's experience illustrates, redistricting also involves something more fundamental: the battle for representation, and how it can pit communities against one another and, sometimes, even their elected leaders' interests.



An intersection at 114th Street and Liberty Avenue in Queens. Three of four corners fall in different State Assembly districts. James Estrin/The New York Times

Asian American activists in other parts of the city are also trying to capitalize on their surge in population over the past decade to ensure that cohesive legislative districts replace splintered ones in Elmhurst, Queens, and in Sunset Park and Bensonhurst in Brooklyn.

Further afield, cities like Ithaca and Rochester that lean Democratic but were split by Republicans a decade ago for overtly partisan reasons are pushing for more coherent district lines.

But the situation in Richmond Hill may illustrate most clearly just how hard it can be to break decades of political inertia, particularly when those drawing the final lines could have an interest in maintaining the status quo.

“For any community to really come to its rightful place in America, you need folks from that community that rise up take on a leadership position and have a viable way to elected office,” said John Albert, a well-connected lobbyist and the founder of Taking Our Seat, a group that has helped organize a campaign to unite the area’s fractured legislative districts.

There is no easy answer for why exactly the cracks formed in Richmond Hill or why have persisted. There does not appear to have been an overt effort to keep South Asians out of power or to target the area. Instead, political scientists point to a mix of inertia, self-interest on the part of Democratic incumbents and legal precedents that tend to punish newcomers.

Roman B. Hedges, who helped draw the Assembly maps for three decades as a member of a legislative task force, defended the current boundaries as a best attempt at balancing competing political interests.

Another consideration, he said, involved the complex legal requirements created by the Voting Rights Act and the courts for protecting the ability of African Americans, Latinos and Asians to elect candidates of their choice and draw districts that are all of roughly equal size.

In an area as diverse as Queens, that means mapmakers must essentially preserve existing districts dominated by one of those groups before addressing what to do about newer or less homogeneous ones like Richmond Hill.

Part of the problem may be that the South Asian community’s size in the area is hard to measure. Although people of Indo-Caribbeans heritage trace their lineage to India, large numbers choose not to identify as “Asian” on census forms, selecting “other” instead. As a result, at least on paper, there is not the kind of dominant ethnic group that mapmakers must heed.

“Maybe it is not so much a plot to prevent as a hope to create elsewhere for other purposes,” Mr. Hedges said. “If you are in the community that is not the focus, maybe it feels like, ‘I was not paid attention to and I now am going to make my voice known.’”

But there may be more politically oriented reasons.

Incumbents can pad their districts by slicing off as “filler” small parts of immigrant communities, which redistricting experts said are less likely to vote in primaries. That way, they can maintain the number of constituents required by law without diluting their own base of support.

Once that community matures and becomes more politically engaged, a lawmaker may have little incentive to give up those votes, preferring to keep the district lines intact.

“What I do know is what the community looks like now and what it’s looked like for a few decades now,” said Aminta Kilawan-Narine, the founder of the South Queens Women’s March, an advocacy group. “These lines are not reflective of that history, they are not reflective of the people who live here.”

John Albert is pushing to unite the Richmond Hill, Queens, area in one legislative district. For an immigrant group to truly establish itself in America, he said, its members need “a viable way to elected office.” James Estrin/The New York Times

South Ozone Park and Richmond Hill, which run north from John F. Kennedy Airport, through streets lined with Queen Anne-style homes and elevated subway lines, are familiar emblems of modern New York City. Traditional white ethnic enclaves have been reformulated by Latino and, later, South Asian immigrants, with stores selling saris and roti replacing Italian bakeries and German beer halls.

But although the influx of newcomers has coalesced and become a dominant force culturally, political power has lagged. That is largely because of an incoherent patchwork of City Council, State Senate and, above all, Assembly districts.

Divided among so many representatives, many in the community have grudgingly concluded that they are the priority of no one.

Take brick-and-mortar district offices, the linchpins of government services and administration that provide a point of contact for constituents, take feedback to Albany and act as clearing houses for state benefit and relief programs. Of the seven Assembly members who represent parts of the area, only one, David I. Weprin, has opened a district office.

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“We felt as if we were not a part of the democratic process, we felt neglected, we felt voiceless,” said Taj Rajkumar, a Guyanese-American professor who ran unsuccessfully for an Assembly seat in 2000 on a platform that included a call for more immigrant services, a community center for older residents, increased job training and a health clinic.

“All of our struggles and all of our cries were falling on deaf ears,” Mr. Rajkumar said. “That was the sentiment of the community then and now.”

Those who favor redrawing district lines to unify a community's voice have looked optimistically to New York's new independent, bipartisan redistricting commission, which is supposed to remove lawmakers from the mapmaking process.

When the panel released its first draft maps in September, Democratic members proposed combining most of Richmond Hill and South Ozone Park in one Assembly district.

But it may not be that simple. The commission's Republican members did not agree to the changes, and the panel appears headed for the kind of partisan gridlock that could doom its proposals. If that happens, the process would revert to the State Legislature, which may be less receptive to the community's appeals.

The best hope for proponents of redrawing Richmond Hill's district lines could be that the commission's maps give the Legislature a new starting point, effectively shaming lawmakers.

Mr. Weprin acknowledged that his district made little sense geographically, with a major highway cutting Richmond Hill off from the heart of the district. He said he had done his best to represent an “area I didn't know anything about” before becoming its assemblyman, and that he understood the community's interest in having a single representative.

“I'm not going to actively lobby one way or another,” he said. “I could live with whatever the outcome is, but if I was going to lose that area, I'd want to see what they would offer me in terms of making up the population.”

Assemblywoman Jenifer Rajkumar, whose Woodhaven-based district collides with Mr. Weprin's in Richmond Hill, has more fully positioned herself behind the drive to draw a single seat based there. In 2020, she became the first South Asian woman ever elected to state office in New York.

“Right now, the South Asian community is hungry and determined to be heard,” she said. “Things are changing. We are taking our seat at this table of power both in our state and nationally.”

In the pandemic's darkest days, Mr. Nabie eventually succeeded in securing help for his parishioners: Mr. Weprin delivered personal protective equipment; city officials turned the church into an impromptu vaccination site.

Some damage, though, may take longer to repair.

“It has created a sense of apathy and disillusionment with the system,” he said. “People feel, ‘I don’t care anymore, they are not going to listen to me, they are not going to do anything for me.’ That’s a terrible place to be.”