To the Commissioners of the Independent Redistricting Commission,

My name is Jagpreet Singh and I am the Political Director of Desis Rising Up and Moving (DRUM). We are a community based organization in NYC that organizes the working class South Asian and Indo-Caribbean communities around issues of immigration, housing, inequity, civic engagement and more. At the IRC hearings in January and February 2023, you had the opportunity to hear from many of our members and organizers across the city about where their communities are, where their borders are, where they worship, eat, live, shop and so much more. I am writing this written testimony to summarize our requests. We joined our coalition partners in APA Voice for all these hearings, and they have provided maps for all of our recommendations.

In the Bronx, you heard our members thanking the Commission for uniting all of Westchester Square and Parkchester in AD 87. These two adjoined neighborhoods have become an anchor community for the Bangladeshi community. NYC Districting Commission’s Communities of Interest report shows that in the last decade the Bangladeshi community here has grown over 110% and jumped from 3% of the district to 11%. Many of the community institutions including the Starling Bangladeshi business corridor and community institutions like the Performing Arts Center and our offices are located in Parkchester. While a lot of the community also lives next door in Westchester Square, there are also a number of community Masjids in Westchester Square. We hope the commission keeps these two communities together.

In South Queens, we also thanked the Commission regarding AD24, the Richmond Hill and South Ozone Park district. Our Punjabi and Indo-Caribbean communities have been here for decades and have made this area a world capital for Cuisine and Culture. The Sikh community, which is made up of mostly Punjabis from North India, has their oldest religious institution in Richmond Hill as well as the Little Punjab Corridor. As are many Mandirs, Roti Shops, and other community institutions important to the Indo-Caribbean community. The Little Guyana corridor is also in this district. Our communities have been an important part of the fabric of this state and city, yet for the last 5 decades, there has never been a district that centered our communities. For the past decade, we were egregiously divided into 7 districts, last year that was changed to 3. We ask the commission to keep your draft for AD24 and give us a single unified district.

In East Queens, we asked the commission to split up the “Backwards C” AD26 district into two districts. Both of these districts would include the requisite number of people for an assembly district as defined by law and as you can see from the maps that APA Voice submitted. While our partners and allies discussed why the northern part deserved to be kept whole, we discussed why the southern part needs to be kept whole. The Hillside corridor is the longest South Asian commercial corridor in all of NYC. It starts with the largest Bangladeshi community in all of NYC, in the Jamaica portion of Hillside. It spans many blocks and features many grocery stores, restaurants, apartments comprised of mostly Bangladeshis, community institutions and so much more. This then spans across North Hollis and Queens Village which is home to a mostly residential Indo-Caribbean and Bangladeshi community. And the corridor ends in Glen Oaks where you see many Indian, Pakistani, and Punjabi stores, institutions and communities. This is a vibrant part of Queens which sees people from across South Asian living side by side. The Hillside corridor has historically been split and we are asking you to keep it whole and keep it as one district.

In West Queens, you heard our members ask for minor tweaks to AD30. As a resident of this district, I was excited to see the IRC suggest this Asian majority district last year in the initial revision, and to see the senate adopt it. It resulted in the first Filipino elected in NY State and is a cohesive and unified district. Your revisions in this cycle make it even better. We are only asking for minor tweaks to make it whole. By including 75th, you ensure all of 74th street Between Roosevelt and 37th Ave in Jackson Heights is covered, the main and oldest South Asian shopping corridor in all of the East Coast. We also made revisions north to capture more of the South Asian, including Nepali and Bangladeshis communities in East Elmhurst.

Additionally, we were dismayed to see the 36th Ave corridor in Astoria was split into multiple districts. Between Northern Boulevard to the East river, there are many Bangladeshi restaurants, businesses, and Masjids on this corridor, much of the diverse Muslim community who lives in Astoria utilizes it, and there’s a new establishment for the community opening there every month. The communities that live along it to the north and south have been split into 3 separate districts, when for years they were kept together. We ask the commission revisit this decision and find a better solution which does not split the Astoria Bangladeshi and Muslim community and keep them whole in one district.

Finally in Brooklyn, our members testified on why they call Kensington whole. This has been the biggest growing Bangladeshi hub in Brooklyn, and this community elected the first Bangladeshi to any New York elected office as a councilmember. We asked for only minor tweaks to ensure the communities that reside around Church ave, Beverly Street, the Ave C plaza, and Kensington plaza are kept together. As the commission draft stands, masjids and community centers are excluded from the Kensington Assembly district.

I once again want to thank you for your efforts in this process. There was a lot in the IRC draft map of December 1, 2022 which showed us as a community that you listened and took our considerations from the last round of hearings seriously. We want you to continue that track record and present the State Legislature with maps that reflect our communities’ homes, interests, and livelihoods. As you know we are also part of the APA Voice Taskforce, and we had some of the biggest turnout across the city. While we don’t have members in all the districts the APA maps cover, we stand in solidarity with our fellow community members in demanding districts that represent their best interests as well. We ask you to adopt our maps in your final proposal.

 Jagpreet Singh, Political Director, Desis Rising Up and Moving (DRUM)