



New York State Independent Redistricting Commission Hearing - Bronx County

Tuesday, November 9, 2021 3:00 PM

BronxWorks Gymnasium, 1130 Grand Concourse Bronx, NY 10456

State Senator Gustavo Rivera • 33rd District, The Bronx

I am State Senator Gustavo Rivera and I represent the 33rd Senate District in the Bronx. My district spans across 8 different community boards, 8 precincts as well as two Public Service Areas, creating a broad range of constituents that are held together as Bronxites.

After thorough review of the New York State Independent Redistricting Commission's proposed State Senate District maps, I have become increasingly concerned that these proposals would effectively split neighborhoods that are cohesive communities. This will not only lessen the electoral power of Bronx residents, but it could make advocating for some of the hardest hit and most underserved areas in my borough even more challenging.

Let's begin with the Letters proposals. The districts that include parts of the Bronx are AI, AJ, AQ, BA, BB, and X. District X, for example, takes sections of Community Districts 6 and 7, parts of which fall in my district, and groups them with areas in the Southeast Bronx that currently have entirely different representatives than those that serve them today. District X would lump a Queens neighborhood, College Point, in with the small portion of the Northwest Bronx along with the Southeast Bronx. College Point has a demographic and socioeconomic makeup that is vastly different from that of Belmont and Fordham Heights. I am concerned that a State Senator representing such a proposed district will face significant challenges given a constituency with such fundamentally different needs.

Districts BA and BB also include neighborhoods that I currently represent. District BB would group residents from 138th Street all the way north to 197th St, yet small portions of the western border of these neighborhoods would be served by a State Senator that primarily represents Northern Manhattan in District AI. District AI takes small portions of Kingsbridge Heights, where

I live, and University Heights, making these Bronx residents a small minority compared to that of Washington Heights and Inwood.

While the West Bronx has increased the number of Latino residents over the years, Districts BA and BB appear to split a longstanding African American community down the middle, along Webster Avenue. Separating Crotona Park from those residents along Webster Avenue who live adjacent to the park does a disservice by asking two different state senators to serve the local needs of one community. Further, the NYCHA developments along that corridor between Claremont and Crotona Park are already split into two Senate districts between north and south. Keeping those neighborhoods in Community Districts 3 and 4 whole is important for adequate state representation through the redistricting process.

The Names proposals are similar in that they disenfranchise Bronxites in lower income neighborhoods. The Heights-Harlem and Heights-Inwood districts would split up the West Bronx and attach these neighborhoods to districts in Northern Manhattan. Heights-Inwood will undoubtedly concentrate the electoral power of middle-income constituents in Riverdale and Inwood and disenfranchise Bronxites in University Heights and Kingsbridge Heights.

Communities in the South Bronx would split up between the Heights-Harlem district and the Crotona-Claremont district, the latter being a poor moniker considering the majority of constituents in that proposed district would be in Hunts Point, Melrose, and closer to the Bruckner Expressway. In the neighborhoods I represent in the West Bronx, we need to continue building power in political representation by increasing civic engagement. Unfortunately, the three proposals I outlined would carve up these communities and disempower them in the process.

I urge the Commission to reconsider these proposed maps. These proposals as they currently stand would have a negative impact on the future of the neighborhoods I serve. The Bronx is vast, diverse, and must be empowered. Therefore, it is in the interest of our State that when we go through the redistricting process, these districts remain intact or close to their current form. Our borough deserves a redistricting proposal that strengthens community representation, not one that cedes our power to other boroughs.