

Asian American Bar Association of New York

STATEMENT

to the

NEW YORK STATE INDEPENDENT REDISTRICTING COMMISSION

November 23, 2021

The Asian American Bar Association of New York (AABANY) is the largest diverse bar association in New York and the United States with over 1,500 paid members. AABANY is committed to ensuring the fair administration of justice for both Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) attorneys and the AAPI community in New York. We submit these comments on the proposed redistricting maps being considered by the New York Independent Redistricting Commission to urge support of the Unity Map proposal formulated by the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, the Center for Law and Social Justice, and Latino Justice.

The current redistricting efforts are of particular significance to the AAPI community in New York, given the substantial growth of the AAPI population in the past decade -- from 1,038,388 in 2010 to 1,385,144 in 2020. The increase in the number of AAPIs accounted for 42.1% of the population growth in New York State, which has grown less than five percent in the same time period.¹ The AAPI

¹ Population data was obtained from a search of the database of the U.S. Census Bureau at: <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=New%20York%20State%20population%202010&tid=DECENNIALCD1132010.P1>.

community now constitutes 15.8% of the population in New York City and 9.5% in New York State.

Despite the growing number of AAPIs in New York, there have been few AAPIs elected to the New York State Senate and Assembly. There are only three AAPI State Senators out of 63 in New York Senate (Senators Jeremy Cooney, John Liu and Kevin Thomas) and three AAPI Assembly Members serving in the 150-person State Assembly (Assembly Members Ron Kim, Yuh-Line Niou and Jennifer Rajkumar). Congresswoman Grace Meng became the first AAPI representative from New York to serve in Congress when she was elected in 2013.

After examining the maps proposed, AABANY finds that the Unity Plan maps better protect the interests of the AAPI community and other diverse communities than the maps identified as the "Letters" plan and the "Names" plan. As a general matter, the maps under the Unity Plan contain more proposed Assembly and Senate districts with AAPI majorities or pluralities. The proposed Unity Assembly Senate Map contain five majority AAPI populations --Assembly districts 7 at 59.0%, 8 at 71.2%, 16 at 58.1%, 37 at 58.0% and 49 at 58.6%. On the other hand, the Letters Assembly map, which covers generally the same areas, has four AAPI majority districts – AD Y at 61.2%, AN at 70.3%, AI at 58.3% and AW at 59.3%. The Names Senate map provides very different districts which are not comparable, but, in any event, proposes only three Asian American majority districts: KISSENA at 63.6%, MRYHLFSHNG at 70.6% and WODELM at 56.0%.

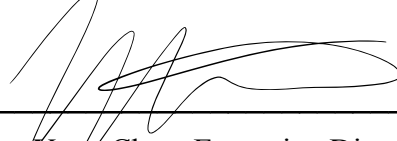
Similarly, the Unity plan map for Senate districts provide for two AAPI majority districts – 5 at 61.5% and 15 at 51.1%, -- while there is only one AAPI majority district each in the proposed Letters and Names plans: district AV at 65.5% and district KISSENA at 63.3%, respectively.

We also find that some communities are unnecessarily divided under the Letters and Names plans. In the Letter R Senate district, Manhattan Chinatown is separated from the Lower East Side community, even though both communities share many common interests from economically similar groups. Although Chinatown and the Lower East Side are kept together in DWNTWNBKLYN under the Names plan, that district also includes the communities across the East River, including Dumbo, Fort Green and Clinton Hill, which have very different communities. As one of the commentors mentioned, the district should have been extended instead to the Wall Street area, which has developed and shared business and community interests with Chinatown since 9/11. Unity Map SD 19 keeps intact Chinatown, the Lower East and the West side from the Wall Street area to Chelsea together.

In addition, as mentioned by one of the other participants, the Letters Plan and the Names Plan divide the South Asian and Indo-Caribbean communities in Richmond Hill and Ozone Park into different Senate Districts. See SD P and FORESTOZONE. However, those communities are kept together in SD 7 in the Unity Plan.

Thus, we urge the Commission to adopt the Unity Plan for determining Assembly and State Senate districts.

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Yang Chen', is written over a solid horizontal line.

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