



**Queens County Public Meeting with the NY Independent Redistricting Commission  
Testimony of Shivana Jorawar, Co-Director of Jahajee Sisters**

**November 17, 2021**

Good evening. Thank you for the opportunity to address this Commission. My name is Shivana Jorawar and I am a Co-Director of Jahajee Sisters, an organization with over one thousand members founded in 2007. We are testifying today because the survivors we serve need for Richmond Hill, South Ozone Park, and Ozone Park to remain whole. We urge the Commission to consider the UNITY map as proposed by the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, Latino Justice, and the Medgar Evers College Center for Law and Social Justice.

Jahajee Sisters is a healing and political home for Indo-Caribbeans who have survived or are at risk for experiencing gender-based violence, and we organize with them to achieve gender justice. My members are immigrant and first-generation survivors, child witnesses, and working class women vulnerable to abuse at home and on the job. We experience domestic violence at alarming rates, and the areas we live in are resource deserts. In fact "Little Guyana" has been one of the most impacted by COVID infections and also one of the last to receive testing or vaccine sites.

We are part of the South Queens Redistricting Coalition, a group of community residents, organizers, and organizations formed to correct the gerrymandering of the Richmond Hill, Ozone Park and South Ozone Park neighborhoods of Queens. The South Asian community is anchored by significant Indo-Caribbean, Punjabi, and Bengali populations. These communities contributed to the significant growth of the Asian American population in Queens and stands in unity with the pan-Asian community in asking for a greater voice in representative government.

We know that the Asian population's growth in Queens over the last 10 years is a whopping - 29% , the largest of any racial group. If the new lines are to be taken seriously, if they are to to be seen as legitimate and just, they need to reflect that.

Our community of interest is now split among 7 assembly districts and 4 senate districts. Imagine what that means for advocates like me who are fighting for better conditions. Why should we have to make demands of so many different legislative offices? Why should we stretch the valuable time of our working class members who are struggling to make ends meet but yet come to share their stories with elected officials?

We have been set up to fail, set up to stay powerless, to burn out. This is time we could be using to get survivors out of abusive homes, to attend to their mental health, and to be with our own families. And when we need elected officials to advocate for us, too often the buck gets passed because our electeds can say “this is the responsibility of X, Y, or Z other legislator.”

We and our coalition allies were hopeful that the Commission would unite our neighborhoods. We were very encouraged by the letters Assembly AL map but when the Commission released two sets of maps, many people were confused. Since there is such a departure from the letters plan and the names plan and between the Assembly and Senate lines, we urge the Commission to create just one map and to get behind the UNITY map. This map is a joint effort of the communities of color.

Our neighborhoods are devastatingly gerrymandered. We need one Assembly, one State Senate, and one Congressional District to substantially represent our neighborhoods.

We want to make sure redistricting is done fairly and with justice as the guiding force. **We urge you to develop one set of maps and we urge you to adopt the Unity Map.**

Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Shivana Jorawar". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'S' and 'J'.

Shivana Jorawar  
Co-Director, Jahajee Sisters