

Good day members of the NY State Independent Redistricting Committee, community members and elected officials. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Joan Alexander-Bakiriddin and I am speaking on behalf of my community and Brooklyn NAACP. I am a resident of East Flatbush, which is in Kings County and bordered by Crown Heights, Flatbush, East New York and Canarsie.

Following the redistricting process in 2011, we became the beneficiary of a new Senatorial District (SD21) but my block was carved in half. Literally. On my side of the block, we saw a change of legislator moving to Assembly District 58 while on the other side of the block they remained in our original district (AD41). I live in a NORC (naturally occurring retirement community) so imagine how troubling it was for the seniors on my side of the block to seemingly lose the personal touch that they consistently experienced from their Assembly Member. These seniors have served as caregivers, first responders, teachers and other worthwhile pursuits; and have given much to their community. They felt like they lost some of the resources that they worked hard for and came to expect. They also had to relearn how to navigate the office of their new representative after finally getting into a cadence of engagement with their previous one.

According to the Center for Law and Social Justice Report on People of African Descent in NYC¹, “The Black West Indian population decreased by 135,749” with Brooklyn accounting for 54% of this decline. They also noted that Manhattan, Queens, and Staten Island, collectively, accounted for 23% of NYC’s Afro West Indian population decline. As we walk around these boroughs, even during COVID-19, the streets and public transportation tell a different tale. When you greet your neighbor you quite frequently receive a response in the lilting accent of a person of West Indian descent.

I mention outer boroughs in my commentary because the commission's proposed “Names” map will expand CD9 into Queens County while currently we are only in Kings County. This is perplexing as it is not clear how an elected official will be able to effectively service a community which is housed in such a large territory. We have gone from 30.7% compactness to 16.8%. Isn’t the goal to be more compact? What would be the benefit to the people that will fall within this planned map?

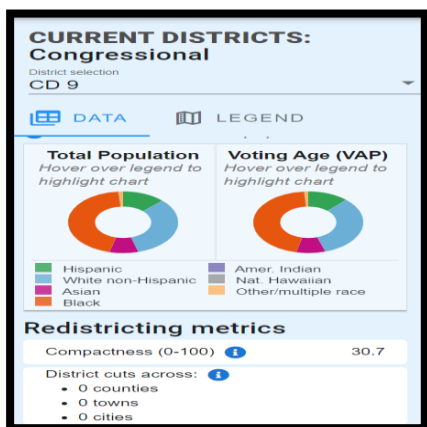


Figure 1

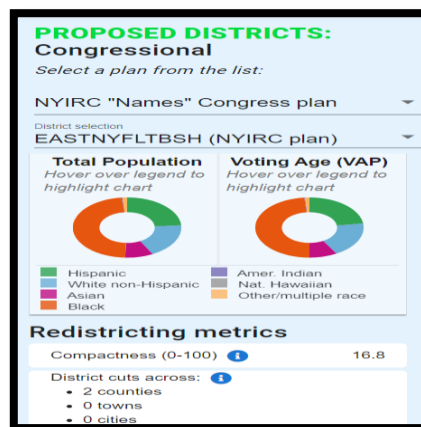


Figure 2

¹ <https://www.clsj.org/coi-report>

While there appears to be a conscious attempt to keep communities together along racial lines; as noted in Figure 1 and Figure 2² above, there is no attention being paid to the impact on communities when you create a district that includes another county. What of the potential impact to federal funding for people in this district when it is spread across Queens *and* Kings County? How will there be equitable allocations for important services like schools, hospitals, healthcare and other programs; and services, imperative for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) and other underserved communities. We must also make sure that there is no “packing” of “minority” voters into CD9 in an attempt to prevent them from impacting elections in bordering neighborhoods.

Commissioners, I urge you to pay close consideration to the disruption to equity in resources and attention that could be caused when you reposition CD9 to spread across 2 counties. Thank you for your time and the opportunity to testify.

² <https://newyork.redistrictingandyou.org/>