Good afternoon. My name is Miriam Bensman. I’m a member of the Central Queens Redistricting Coalition and a resident of Richmond Hill for the past 21 years. I am speaking for the Coalition and myself about the state maps proposed by the Commission that affect my community, Richmond Hill. We’re not commenting on the Congressional maps at this time.

We believe the Commission’s state maps fall far short of the ideals of fairness, non-partisanship, and community focus, and dilute our communities’ ability to advocate for representation and resources.

Many of my Richmond Hill neighbors testified fervently at the Commission’s first Queens hearing that our community is chopped up into three Senate Districts (the 10th, 14th and 15th) and four Assembly districts (the 24th, 27th, 28th, and 38th). As a recent New York Times story vividly showed, this predominantly IndoGuyanese and Latino immigrant community feels disempowered and ignored. When I knocked on Richmond Hill doors for a candidate two year ago, the residents were amazed. They’d never heard from a political campaign before! That wasn’t true in other Queens neighborhoods where I campaigned.

Our Coalition supports keeping Richmond Hill whole and empowering its residents. We submitted an Assembly map that includes all of Richmond Hill and South Richmond Hill, along with a bit of Woodhaven. We submitted a Senate map that puts Richmond Hill into a new district with similar, adjoining communities, including South Richmond Hill, Ozone Park, South Ozone Park, and Woodhaven. A large majority of the populations in both of these maps are so-called minorities.

The proposed “Letters” Assembly map is similar to ours. District AL includes most (though not all!) of Richmond Hill and South Richmond Hill, adjoining communities with a similar ethnic mix and shared shopping, schools and houses of worship. Thank you!

In contrast, the proposed “Names” Assembly map slices up Richmond Hill and South Richmond Hill.  Parts of both are included in the sprawling RCHMDStALBNS district that extends east all the way to Laurelton. Other  parts of both are combined with parts of Ozone Park and South Ozone Park in the STHOZNBSLY district that extends across the Van Wyck Expressway into South Jamaica and Rochdale.

As for the Senate maps--both keep Richmond Hill and South Richmond Hill more or less intact. Thank you for that. However, both combine them with the wrong neighborhoods, in our view..

Senate Map P combines most of Richmond Hill, Ozone Park and Woodhaven and only half of South Richmond Hill and half of South Ozone Park, while including Howard Beach. This is unfortunate. Ozone Park, South Ozone Park and South Richmond Hill residents belong together. They shop at the same food and sari stores on Rockaway Boulevard and Liberty Avenue.

Howard Beach, by contrast, is cut off from Ozone Park by Conduit Avenue and park land. Its Italian American community is famously insular, seldom venturing into the communities to its north. And those communities seldom hang out in Howard Beach.

Then there are the Civil Rights issues. Including Howard Beach makes Letters Map  District P far whiter than the one we drew. And because Howard Beach’s population has a much greater share of citizens and active voters than the largely immigrant communities to the north, Howard Beach tends to dominate in elections. We saw that in the City Council election in November.

The Names Senate map includes much of South Ozone Park in the JFKBRZY district and much of South Richmond Hill in the Jamaica district. The ForestOzone district combines Richmond Hill, Woodhaven, Ozone Park and parts of both South Richmond Hill and South Ozone Park with whiter, more affluent Kew Gardens, Kew Gardens Hills and much of Forest Hills. I think a candidate from the southern, darker-skinned part of the district would rarely prevail in an election in this proposed district.

Commissioners, you seem to have heard Richmond Hill to some degree. Some of the maps you drew keep the community mostly intact. But your Senate maps still disempower the community, by combining it with dissimilar neighboring areas that would dominate it.

Thank you for your time and consideration.