January 19, 2022

Karen Blatt

Co-Executive Director

Douglas Breakell

Co-Executive Director

New York State Independent Redistricting Commission

Dear Directors Blatt and Breakell:

The new redistricting map made by the Independent Redistricting Committee totally disenfranchises two distinct yet historically connected African American communities that have voted together for 30+ years and elected representation that reflected its interests in homeownership, economic empowerment, and social issues.

The present 35th Assembly District has African American communities in North Corona, East Elmhurst, LeFrak City and Sherwood Apartments that has enabled an Assembly Member to go to Albany and make legislative appropriations that address social inequities that manifest in drug abuse, allow for the creation and maintenance of a growing senior citizen population, and create programming support for youth betterment through sport and job training.

There is also a strong connection with these communities and LaGuardia Airport where opportunities have always been present for franchise ownership serving the unending stream of passengers passing through, andfor service contracts in the airport facility.

Presently, issues around automobile traffic (with its resultant congestion and pollution) and alternative means of transportation to and from this upgraded airport are being debated. Obviously, this State issue has a major impact on the surrounding community’s quality of life.

In addition, cultural institutions in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park have historically been a part of this district as these two communities are connected both geographically and through local usage of these important areas.

The proposed new Assembly District lines take the 10,000+ residents in North Corona and East Elmhurst and put them in a newly created 34th Assembly District. It takes the 2,500+ residents of Lefrak City and Sherwood Apartments and puts them in the newly created 39th Assembly District. Neither of the two new ADs have residents with the same number of ethnicities that would empower either community as one would be overwhelming Hispanic, while the other White, Orthodox Jewish (Russian ancestry), North Asian and Indian (south Asia).

This strong Black community presently served by the 35th Assembly District would disappear – as its votes would be diluted with the inability to elect its own representative.

Redistricting is a difficult process as many competing interests and groups look to have their voices heard. Yet, this “cracking” of a district draws lines that decrease Black representation in an area that has consistently elected the Black community’s candidate of choice. The drawing of a legislative line should not cause harm to minority votes; rather, it should reflect a “portrait” of the people they represent, with all their nuances and special features.

The preservation of existing political communities reflected in the cores of prior districts must include racial fairness to have meaningful representation. The proposed new lines do not reflect this priority; they would divide the political representation of these African American communities ensuring their minority status thereby reducing – if not eliminating - their power to be adequately represented in State government.

Any new legislative lines drawn pursuant to the 2020 Census, must take these factors into account before any map is finalized. The African American communities of North Corona, East Elmhurst, LeFrak City and Sherwood Apartments must be kept together in a unified Assembly District.

Sincerely,

Valery Calderon

C: Honorable Jeffrion Aubry, Assembly Member, 35th Assembly District

Howard Vargas, Executive Council to the Speaker