

**Testimony of the Arab American Association of New York to the New York State Independent Redistricting Commission**

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Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on behalf of the Arab American Association of New York (AAANY). We are a community based-organization in Brooklyn that primarily serves the Arab immigrant population of Bay Ridge. AAANY is a member of the New York Immigration Coalition’s (NYIC) Mapping Our Future coalition, a statewide coalition of advocates dedicated to mobilizing the grassroots to get involved in redistricting and advocate for a fair process and fair maps.

AAANY has long been a champion for immigrants’ rights. We work tirelessly to engage Arab immigrants in various political campaigns. Unfortunately, the reality is that many immigrant communities feel alienated by the electoral process in the United States. Whether it is the surveillance of Muslim communities or the collusion between ICE and police departments across the nation, it is clear that the rights of immigrants in the US have been undermined again and again. The gerrymandered maps of the State Assembly only serve to reinforce the further alienation of immigrant populations. We know that immigrants greatly contribute to the economy and play a major role in every area of the economy. Our hope is that creating maps that accurately represent our neighborhoods will encourage community members to feel seen and heard, thus centering our voices in the political process.

The redistricting process, and the districts as they are now, are difficult for some of our community members to fully understand. This is unfortunate because it diminishes our community’s ability to participate in democracy. The districts, as they are now, confuse the boundaries of our neighborhoods which ultimately reduces our voting power. According to the most recent American Community Survey data, Bay Ridge contains approximately 9,000 people of Arab ancestry. This represents 11% of the neighborhood's total population of approx 80,000. According to tract-level data, the Arab population is concentrated in part of the neighborhood where the boundaries of three different Assembly Districts converge, resulting in the community being split between three different representatives. In the current map, our community is divided between Assembly Districts that reach as far north as Red Hook, as far south as the southern half of Staten Island, and as far west as Brighton Beach. The IRC's proposed maps similarly divide Bay Ridge into three districts, and connect portions of it to far flung neighborhoods in Brooklyn and Manhattan. Splitting our community in this way has historically resulted in our community being unable to elect candidates who share their experiences and who will prioritize their needs.

Our demand is entirely reasonable. We are not asking for other groups in our neighborhood to be excluded from democracy. All we are asking is that the Assembly Districts of Bay Ridge be redrawn to accurately reflect and keep together our community, so that their voice can be heard. We ask that our districts receive clear, easy to understand boundaries, and that partisan and political gerrymandering be eliminated from the electoral map.

It's no secret that the history of South Brooklyn is a history of politicians more interested in protecting their seats than representing the neighborhoods of our city. We ask that this committee takes steps to write the wrongs of the past and draw clear democratic boundaries for our assembly districts to increase democratic fairness and ensure that everyone in our community receives the representation they deserve.

Thank you.