**Dr. Minewattie Gayadin Ali, Ed.D**

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**South Ozone Park, NY 11420**

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**New York State-Redistricting Testimony**

**South Ozone Park, Ozone Park, Richmond Hill Community-Queens, New York**

February 6, 2023

Good afternoon respected Chair Ken Jenkins, Vice Chair Charles Nesbitt, and respected Commissioners of the Redistricting Commission.

I am Dr. Minewattie Gayadin Ali Ed.D., a retired New York City Department of Education teacher with 24 years teaching in the schools in this area*.*  I also live in this district.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify before the Redistricting Committee, and submit my testimony, and for your commendable and tedious work, and for fairly drawing a Map, “AL” that keeps us together. The fact that both of the honorable members of the Democratic, Republican and Independent parties agreed on this map, is compelling, and you must keep it whole, as configured as “AL.” Well done!

 Again, I would like to commend you for Draft Map AL- a State Assembly district in which you kept the Communities of Interest, South Ozone Park, Ozone Park and Richmond Hill together. That’s a step in the right direction. Words cannot convey the gratitude our community feels for your wonderful efforts. For the very first time, we have been drawn together in any configuration-City, State and/or Federal government. It was a historic effort, and we thank you.

You certainly listened to us, but our representatives preferred to keep us divided, sliced and diced, in their attempt to divide and rule, and hold on to power. This is not fair to the people of our community. They attempted to undo your great work, changed back the maps to continue to slice and dice, but the Court rebuffed them for gerrymandering. Their political actions caused their maps to be thrown out, which brings us back to you. Please do not allow this terrible injustice of dividing us to repeat itself.

 South Ozone Park, Ozone Park and Richmond Hill are a solid, contiguous, historic and expanding community of interest. We are a largely South Asian, Guyanese, Punjabi, Bangladeshi and Indo-Caribbean population, protected by the Voting Rights Act, and we face the same issues, and have common interests, and solutions.

 The outlying communities of Howard Beach, Ridgewood, Kew Gardens, Jamaica, and the Rockaways deserve, and have, their own representation, but have nothing in common with us. We cannot continue to have elected representatives associated with these communities who do not understand nor address the needs of our overwhelming Indo-Caribbean and South Asian immigrant population of South Ozone Park, Ozone Park, and Richmond Hill. Previously, we have been used as filler for other communities.

 For example, the schools in South Ozone Park, Ozone Park, and Richmond Hill have a large number of students who are Hindus. Last year, on November 4th, Parent/Teacher Conferences was held on Diwali, a Hindu festival of Lights where families light small Diyas or lamps to pray and celebrate. The schools paid no regard to the students’ culture and religious celebration of Diwali.

 Also, in schools, parents do not have a voice in many changes that are taking place. Parents do not have a say in keeping the much needed Gifted and Talented Programs for their children. Parents in this highly Guyanese, Punjabi, Bangladeshi immigrant community stress the value of good grades and a strong education. Students with good grades should have programs that would help them to excel and reach new heights. Our nation loses out with these short-sighted actions.

 Parents in the South Ozone Park, Ozone Park, and Richmond Hill community do not have an elected representative who speaks, looks and thinks like the majority, and never had an elected representative who can address the educational and social needs of our children. In fact, our community was cut up into seven Districts, now 4, and we never in history had a representative to address the needs of our community. Furthermore, the issue of making changes in School Safety Presence in schools would leave our children/students at great safety risks. One or two Guidance Counselors, or Social Workers cannot handle the safety and well-being of hundreds of students in a school. An elementary school may have about 800 to 1,250 students or more enrolled.

 Furthermore, students in this highly Guyanese immigrant community of South Ozone Park, Ozone Park and Richmond Hill who graduated with a degree in teaching should be hired for teaching jobs in our community. In the South Ozone Park, Ozone Park, and Richmond Hill Community, a school with about 1,250 students, and over 60 teachers, may have one, two or zero teacher from our Guyanese immigrant community.

 Also, schools still do not have meal menus that address the cultural and religious needs of our students in our community. This all circles back to lack of funding and identification of issues caused by not having a district whose issues and problems are focused on.

Drawing new and fair Redistricting lines will determine how our children or students will progress, and the quality of their schooling in the next ten years. You, the Chair, Vice Chair and Commissioners of the Redistricting Committee have the power to be fair and change the lives of our students for a brighter future. Currently, our parents have economic power but no political power. We have paid our dues tenfold, but continue to be ignored.

Our parents in this immigrant community of South Ozone Park, Ozone Park and Richmond Hill do have our share of heart breaks because our children are affected by social issues such as unemployment, loss of self-worth, and suicide. You, collectively, have the power to change this societal problem and injustice in our disenfranchised community by drawing fair Redistricting lines that will give us a chance to elect leaders from our community, leaders who understand our needs, issues, and concerns.

Thank you for your hard work, and for advancing in grouping together South Ozone Park, Ozone Park and Richmond Hill as a community of common interests.

Please see the attached New York Times Article that addresses the sordid inequalities and injustices of the gerrymandering, inequalities that stagnated our children’s growth so inhumanely in the past, and why Map “AL” must be approved into law:

https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/15/nyregion/redistricting-maps-ny.html

Sincerely,

Dr. Minewattie Gayadin Ali Ed.D.

Retired New York City Department of Education Teacher