



## **Testimony for the New York State Independent Redistricting Commission**

November 16, 2021

Thank you to the Independent Redistricting Commission (IRC) for organizing this second series of public hearings.

I am **Yafa Dias**, the **Lead Advocacy Organizer** at the Arab American Association of New York which is a member org of New York Immigration Coalition. NYIC is the lead facilitator of the Mapping Our Future coalition. Mapping Our Future is a statewide coalition of advocates dedicated to mobilizing the grassroots to get involved in redistricting and advocate for a fair process and fair maps.

Fair districts are the foundation for fair representation.

Unfortunately, this commission failed to come to an agreement in September and instead of one compromise draft map, released two partisan maps. This abdication of responsibility has already been discussed and debated and I won't add any more to that, other than to say it has made our job as advocates who care about fair districts substantially more difficult.

AAANY urges the Commission create an Assembly district that keeps Arab communities in South Brooklyn together. We urge the Commission to create an Assembly district consisting of the entirety of Bay Ridge and Dyker Heights. This proposed district is

compact and meets the population requirement of approximately 134,500 residents. We have submitted a map of the proposed district to the Commission, along with our request.

Instead of having one map to discuss in detail, we are left with two maps, neither of which we can take seriously. In one map, we saw significant improvements and a clear responsiveness to advocates' testimonies in the senate districts; but that same map had some glaring concerns with the redrawn assembly lines. Another map seems to have completely ignored advocates' testimonies resulting in simpler, if not more representative congressional lines, but somehow still found a way to worsen the already egregiously gerrymandered senate districts, particularly upstate.

In our previous testimony, we urged this commission to adhere to certain principles. Those were:

- Maintaining an up-to-date website of upcoming meetings and events
- An archive of past meetings and events
- Meetings that are open to the public and announced with adequate advanced notice
- A commitment to partner with advocacy organizations on community events; and
- A commitment to engage with ethnic media across multiple platforms so the public is aware of IRC events and announcements

I thank the commission for committing to an open process and for maintaining a website with archived meetings, events, and documents. Moving forward, it is now more important than ever to create a partnership between this commission and advocacy organizations. I particularly urge this commission to take a proactive role in engaging with ethnic media around the state. We stand willing to support you in that effort.

I'm not sure where we go from here. I hope you all can spend the next weeks and months delivering on the promise that New Yorkers voted for in 2014. I hope this commission will fulfill its mission to create fair maps without the partisan and racially-tinged bias of decades prior.

Thank you again and thanks also to the many partners who are in this fight for fair maps and fair representation.