

**MAPPING
OUR FUTURE**

**NYIC'S 2021
REDISTRICTING CAMPAIGN**



Testimony for the New York Independent Redistricting Commission

Sunday December 5th, 2021

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

I am Asher Ross, Senior Strategist at the New York Immigration Coalition Action.

The NYIC serves one of the largest and most diverse newcomer populations in the United States. We have over 200 grassroots member organizations across NY state, representing immigrants and communities of color from Buffalo to Suffolk. We serve as a forum for immigrant groups to voice their concerns, as a platform for collective action to drive positive social change.

The NYIC is the lead facilitator of the Mapping Our Future coalition, a statewide coalition of NYIC member orgs and advocates dedicated to mobilizing the grassroots to get involved in redistricting and advocate for a fair process and fair maps.

Over the course of this year our members have engaged in community education, met with numerous elected officials, raised awareness of our

concerns about redistricting in the media-- and dozens have turned out to testify at these public hearings.

Our mission is to elevate the voices of our members in this process, to speak about the impacts that unfair districts and unfair representation have had on their communities and on their everyday lives.

Fair districts are the foundation for fair representation.

Currently the elected officials in our state legislature do not reflect the diversity of our state.

NY is 45% non-white, but only 32% of our state legislators are non white. 22% of the state is foreign born, but only 8 % of the legislators are; 35% of ny are either immigrants or the children of immigrants, and only 17% of legislators are. The legislature also skews much older, more male, and more highly educated and upper middle class than the population as a whole.

This situation is due largely to gerrymandering of communities of color.

We expect this Commission and the State Leg to create districts that keep our immigrant and BIPOC communities whole, and that empower them to elect candidates of their choice.

Unfortunately, this commission failed to come to an agreement in September and instead of one compromise draft map, released two partisan maps.

These maps contain some significant improvements and a clear responsiveness to advocates' testimonies-- particularly for Asian communities in NYC, which we applaud.

However, other groups were ignored. I want to highlight how Arab communities, including those in Bay Ridge, Astoria, Little Yemen in the Bronx are split both in the current districts and in all of the various proposed Assembly and Senate plans. These populations may not appear as distinct communities of interest in the data, as the census codes them as white; but they form cohesive ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and economic communities of interest across NYC and NY state.

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 hope this commission will fulfill its mission to create fair maps without the partisan and racially-tinged bias of previous decades.

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