Minewattie Gayadin Ali

New York State-Redistricting Testimony

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

December 5, 2021

Good afternoon respected Chair David Imumura and respected Commissioners of the Redistricting Commission.

I am Dr. Minewattie Gayadin Ali Ed.D. I am a Retired New York City Department of Education teacher. I live in South Ozone Park, Queens.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify before the Redistricting Committee virtually, and submit my testimony. Thank you for your hard and tedious work.

I would like to commend you for Draft Map AL- State Assembly 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.

Draft Map P as in Peter should be revised. Howard Beach is not a community of the same interest as Ozone Park, and Richmond Hill. South Ozone Park is a community of interest. Map Draft P as in Peter should be revised so that Howard Beach is replaced with South Ozone Park. South Ozone Park, Ozone Park and Richmond Hill forms a community of interest. We are a largely Guyanese and Guyanese- American population, and we face the same issues, and have common interests.

Howard Beach is not a community of interest with Ozone Park and Richmond Hill. Howard Beach comprises largely of Italians and Italian-Americans who are pre-dominantly Catholic, more affluent, and more politically conservative than the Guyanese and immigrant population of South Ozone Park, Ozone Park and Richmond Hill who are largely Hindus, a small percentage Muslims, and a smaller percentage being Christians. We cannot continue to have elected representatives associated with Howard Beach who do not understand nor address the needs of our highly Guyanese immigrant population of South Ozone Park, Ozone Park, and Richmond Hill.

The schools in South Ozone Park, Ozone Park, and Richmond Hill have a large number of students who are Hindus. This 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 voice in keeping the much needed Gifted and Talented Programs for their children. Parents in this highly Guyanese 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.

Parents in the South Ozone Park, Ozone Park, and Richmond Hill community do not have an elected Guyanese representative, and never had a Guyanese elected representative who can address the educational and social needs of our children. In fact, our community is cut up into seven Districts, 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-

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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.

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 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.

Our parents in our highly Guyanese 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 the Redistricting Chair and Commissioners have the power to change this societal problem and injustice in our Guyanese immigrant community by drawing fair Redistricting lines that will give our Guyanese and immigrant population a chance to elect leaders from our community, leaders who understand our needs, issues, and concerns.

Thank you for your hard work. May you Chair David Imumura, the Commissioners, staff and all Participants and their families who testified or participated in this process have a Happy Holiday Season. Please consider having diversity in your panel, so that we have some commissioners of immigrant groups who can see what we see, hear what we hear, and feel what we feel. We will also be willing to fill out any evaluation form regarding the Redistricting process and experience if a form is made available to the public. Thank you in advance in removing Howard Beach from Draft Map P as in Peter and replacing it with South Ozone Park so that South Ozone Park, Ozone Park and Richmond Hill are grouped as a community of common interest.

Please see the attached New York Times Articles dated 12/2/21 that address our concerns and fair redistricting.

Sincerely,

Dr. Minewattie Gayadin Ali Ed.D.

Retired New York City Department of Education Teacher