

Mark Hanna

Yalla Brooklyn

7504 5th Avenue

Brooklyn, NY 11209

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I am Mark Hanna, Board Member of Yalla Brooklyn, a Social Welfare Organization that was organized predominately by, and with particular focus on uplifting and supporting, the Arab American and Muslim communities in Brooklyn. I am speaking on behalf of the organization today, however, I also live in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn and operate my law practice here, so the issues facing the community are also personal for me.

Yalla is a member of Mapping Our Future - a statewide coalition of advocates and organizations dedicated to mobilizing the grassroots to get involved in redistricting and advocate for a fair process and fair maps.

We're all here today because, unfortunately, this commission failed to come to an agreement in September. Instead of one compromise draft map, we received two partisan maps. This has made our job as advocates who care about fair districts substantially more difficult.

The opportunity to change our cracked and split districts comes only once in a decade and so a tremendous amount of importance is attached to this process. We have to live with the consequences for at least the next ten years.

In the case of my own community, the Arab American and Muslim community of Bay Ridge, we have struggled with representation for significantly longer than a mere decade. I am here in my personal capacity as well as a member of Yalla Brooklyn to urge the Commission to create an Assembly district that keeps Arab communities in South Brooklyn together. We ask you to create a district consisting of the entirety of Bay Ridge and Dyker Heights; this proposed district is compact and meets the total population requirement of approximately 134,500 residents. We are submitting a map of the proposed map of the district along with this request.

It has been nearly 40 years since Bay Ridge had its own Assembly district. It was divided up for political and partisan reasons decades ago and despite political and demographic shifts since that time, the community remains fractured into political divisions that only serve to disempower. In fact, it is a testament to how disempowering it can be to have a community divided up that it has remained divided for so long despite the growth in the Arab and Muslim community over all this time.

Arabs and Muslims account for 11% of the neighborhood of Bay Ridge. Despite being a minority, we have an outsized presence immediately apparent walking up 5th Avenue and seeing the many stores, restaurants and community organizations operated by and catering to Arabs and Muslims of Brooklyn.

However, our presence in the political community is cracked and split three ways into the 46th, 64th and 51st Assembly districts. The community's demographic percentage drops to merely 2% of each of these districts. This renders the community, no matter how politically interested and active – entirely beholden to the rest of the district that they are split into.

We have a cohesive community here and we must have a distinct Assembly district that keeps our neighborhood and communities intact. We have worked diligently on voter registration and turnout for years, and while the success of these efforts is tangible and quantifiable – the actual political voice of the community has remained throttled by absurd district drawing.

So, now we are here today to bring light and attention to this – and remedy it with districts that are better drawn. We need districts that keep communities like mine together to protect New York's immigrants and communities of color, allow challengers to have a fair shot at winning elections, and energize civic engagement. It will allow for my community's needs to be heard and prioritized by our elected leaders, leading to better policy and budget outcomes.

I appreciate your attention to the needs of the Arab and Muslim community in Bay Ridge and I expect that you will be able to find a way to ameliorate the current unrepresentative and cracked conditions we have been embedded in for so many years. Again, we ask you to create a district consisting of the entirety of Bay Ridge and Dyker Heights; this proposed district is compact and meets the total population requirement of approximately 134,500 residents. As noted already, we are submitting a map of the proposed map of the district along with this request.

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