Testimony to the New York State Redistricting Commission Public Hearing

Wednesday, November 17, 2021

Queens, NY

From:

Samuel Garvin Augustin

Thank you for holding this public hearing and allowing me to testify.

My name is Samuel Augustin and I am a resident of South Ozone Park (District 32). I recall my first time looking at the district 31 map. When I located the block of my home, I noticed that I wasn’t a part of the district. Based on geographic proximity and the commonalities between the areas, I saw no reason for my neighborhood to not be.

At the time, I did not know that redistricting was the reason for this. Between then and now, I’ve learned a lot of what redistricting is supposed to be and how it often ends up. The purpose of redistricting is to reflect population changes and racial diversity in a way that ensures accurate representation. However, the reality that sometimes district lines are drawn in a way that disadvantages some groups of people is saddening.

I can admit that my family and I weren’t always aware of what our representative had been doing for our community. Growing up and even still there are many necessary resources that other neighborhoods had that we felt we were missing and didn’t even know how to go about requesting. I would argue that my community wasn’t prioritized as much as the other towns in the district. I do not believe that this is a coincidence nor is it limited to just my community. Now, I am aware that this is a result of my neighborhood as well as Ozone Park, Richmond Hill and South Richmond Hill, which all share the same concerns being divided into multiple districts. With these areas being split into about 7 districts, it is obvious why lack of representation and voice have remained an issue. In terms of race/ethnicity, income and political priorities these 4 communities are practically identical and should be represented as one.

There are certain resources that I would like to see in South Ozone Park and I believe the other communities would agree. With many of the resources being far and few between, we don’t have much to call our own. For starters, I feel that a youth community center/ program is crucial in supporting the youth through their academic, economic, and social struggles. With programs such as recreation, academic aid, summer camps, employment, mentorship and more this goal can be accomplished. Another resource that I would like to see is a homeowners and tenant association. With most of the constituents owning or renting the protection of their rights as well as the welfare of the community is critical. Access to foreclosure prevention workshops, repair services, financial counseling/aide, property preservation and more provides the tools necessary to accomplish such. Finally, I believe that social services that appeal to health, violence prevention and food distribution need to be more apparent. Many individual struggles are attributed to these and they should not feel helpless.

In conclusion, I advocate for better representation. I advocate that the cries of my community no longer fall on deaf ears. We deserve to be heard. We deserve to be one community. We deserve better. Thank You.