

Testimony by Jonathan T. Lazo to the New York State Independent Redistricting Commission:

Dear Independent Redistricting Commission Members,

My name is Jonathan Lazo, I am 15 years old, and I am from Rockaway Park. I speak before you today because it is imperative to unite the Richmond Hill, Ozone Park, and South Ozone Park communities under a single State Senate District. It is not right to divide a community that is one, one in the same identity, one in the same issues that affect them, and one in the same solutions to those issues. To properly address this problem I urge this commission to redraw these marginalized communities into a single state senate seat without Howard Beach. As the identity of Howard Beach more aligns with the identity of my home of Rockaway.

When communities get divided, especially ones of unique heritage such as South Asian, Latinx, and those from the Caribbean, the voice of the community will die. To have a representative that can represent you and not your next door neighbor is absurd. Your problem is your neighbors problem so how is it fair to have two different representatives, who may have different priorities in helping each of their own respective districts who include other communities that have different problems from the Ozone, South Ozone, and Richmond Hill community.

This issue is also one of race. The question is would we have this problem if these communities were mainly of european descent? I think the answer is no we wouldn't have this problem. We finally have an opportunity to stop racism and unite a community under a single State Senate District. You the Independent Redistricting Commission has the power to reverse this. The diversity of this community, the unity of this community should be expressed as one voice. In conclusion the communities of South Ozone Park, Ozone Park, and Richmond Hill must be united under one State Senate District. You, as an independent redistricting commission, must unite them, in accordance with your mandate and the law. Thank you.

Jonathan T. Lazo