

Testimony for the New York State Independent Redistricting Commission

02/14/2023

Dear members of the Independent Redistricting Commission (IRC),

I want to express my gratitude to the IRC for organizing public hearings on the upcoming redistricting cycle. My name is Somia Elrowmeim, and I am the Executive Director of the Women's Empowerment Coalition of NYC, representing my clients and students at WECNYC.

As an organization that provides various training and resources to empower and build capacity for women, we believe that fair districts are crucial for fair representation. This opportunity to draw fair districts only arises once every 10 years, and it is crucial that we get it right this time. If we do not, our communities will have to bear the consequences for the next decade.

New York City is a unique place where people can feel at home even though they are far away from their country of origin. Communities like Little India in Jackson Heights, Little Yemen in the Bronx, and Chinatown in Sunset Park form the foundation of their respective districts. These communities attract people with similar interests, ethnic or racial backgrounds, or political alignments. WECNYC is located in the heart of a heavily concentrated Arab and immigrant population, and we serve the needs of the most vulnerable in our communities. Unfortunately, due to the separation of Arab and Muslims from our district by a single block, many of our clients are not in our district, making our job much harder due to the bureaucracies we have to go through.

For example, one of our clients had problems with a housing case, and although we have an established relationship with our local Assembly member, this client was not from Assembly District 51. Her Assembly representative was the only one who could assist her in this matter, and it took about 4 months for her case to be resolved, even though she lived just a few blocks away from another client we had who lived in the 64th Assembly district. A good redistricting process can remedy

this. Well-drawn districts that keep communities together can protect New York's immigrants and communities of color, allow challengers to have a fair shot at winning elections, and energize civic engagement.

I urge the IRC to consider the entire redistricting process as a public one. More community education events and transparency are needed, and it is essential to have translators and materials translated into different languages so that everyone can understand and engage with the process. It is crucial to ensure that the voices of all communities impacted by this process are heard.

Thank you for your time, and I hope you will take into account the interests of the different communities affected by having their voices suppressed and separated in this crucial process