

## TAKING OUR SEAT

Testimony of Cindy Liang  
South Asian Fund for Education, Scholarship, and Training, Inc (SAFEST)  
Before the New York City Districting Commission  
Thursday, May 26th, 2022

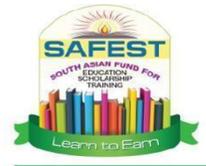
My name is Cindy Liang and I am with South Asian Fund For Education, Scholarship, and Training, Inc (SAFEST), a non-for profit organization that delivers a comprehensive array of services to thousands of South Asian immigrant New Yorkers since 2015. Today SAFEST is jointly submitting testimony with our partner organization, Taking Our Seat, a South Asian led Queens-based demographic data collection and advocacy organization focused primarily on informing the redistricting process. SAFEST and Taking Our Seat are also proud members of the South Queens Redistricting Coalition which includes many similarly minded organizations.

Since the last redistricting cycle, SAFEST and Taking Our Seat have been deeply engaged in the state redistricting process. We educated and organized our community about redistricting and engaged in the process established by the Independent Redistricting Commission and monitored closely the litigation that followed. Thank you for giving me an opportunity to speak about our vibrant South Asian neighborhoods. There are two main areas that I would like to bring your attention to:

**HILLSIDE AVE CORRIDOR** starts from Bellrose, Floral Park, Glen Oaks, Queens Village, Hollis Hills, Jamaica, Jamaica Hills and Briarwood, ending at the Van Wyck Expressway. The common spine of these neighborhoods is Hillside Ave, all the way from the border with Nassau County to the Van Wyck Expressway. What ties these neighborhoods together is not just a road, but the people. The census data may show that these residents are Asian but a visit to the neighborhood reveals that they are of South Asian origin ranging from an influx of medical professionals from India working at LIJ hospitals in the 1970s to Bangladeshi immigrants in recent years. In fact, the area has seen an increase in the number of South Asian American immigrants since the last redistricting cycle.

**RICHMOND HILL/SOUTH OZONE PARK/OZONE PARK** is located west of the Van Wyck Expressway and has its own South Asian flavor. The neighborhood is home to one of the largest Indo-Caribbean communities in the country, joined by Sikh immigrants from the state of Punjab in India and recent immigrants from Bangladesh.

Currently, Hillside Ave Corridor is located among Council Districts 23, 24, and 27 while Richmond Hill/South Ozone Park/Ozone Park is divided to Council Districts 28, 29, and 32. These South Asian neighborhoods east and west of the Van Wyck Expressway are their own unique communities of interest.



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We hope that the Districting Commission can help correct this long-standing dilution of the community's power. The neighborhoods of Richmond Hill/South Ozone Park/Ozone Park have a common community identity rooted in the Indo Caribbean immigrant experience and sufficient population to draw their own Council district. We believe that these neighborhoods should be kept together and whole. The neighborhoods east of the Van Wyck of Hillside Corridor that traverse both sides of Hillside Avenue should have their own independent identity.

Both organizations support the Asian American community of interest boundaries as laid out by the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund. These boundaries clearly map our communities and these communities of interest should serve as the basis of any district lines.

As a SAFEST volunteer, I have the first-hand understanding of challenges that our communities face on a daily basis. Since the start of COVID19, many of our South Asian students have suffered inequity in education ranging from lack of assistance to device requests to lack of mental health support from schools because their parents speak little or no English. Any division of our community will negatively impact the resources and support our community desperately needs.

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