



TAKING OUR SEAT

The South Asian Voice in Redistricting

New York City Districting Commission

Redistricting Hearing for Queens County

Testimony of
Mohammed Sadiq, Taking Our Seat

October 10, 2012

Good evening, my name is Mohammed Sadiq and I am with Taking Our Seat, a Queens-based non-partisan, civic organization. Taking Our Seat was founded to empower South Asian-Americans (SAA) in the electoral process by eliminating South Asian voter dilution through the redistricting process. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to present my testimony.

I submitted testimony at the August redistricting hearing and I testified 10 years ago before the 2002 Districting Commission. I am asking for the same thing that I have always asked for – keep our neighborhoods together in redistricting.

You have the demographic information that I provided earlier at the previous hearing:

According to the 2010 Census, there are 351,000 SAAs in New York City. This represents an increase of 61% over the past decade. Of these, nearly 60% reside in Queens County. The largest communities of SAAs are found in the following cluster of neighborhoods:

- Richmond Hill and South Ozone Park
- Briarwood and Jamaica Hills
- Jackson Heights and Elmhurst
- Bellerose and Floral Park

I will not recount the history of voter dilution in these areas, because you know that Richmond Hill and South Ozone Park are broken into 4 different Council districts; Briarwood and Jamaica Hills are breaking into 3 Council districts.

The Districting Commission's proposed maps give our community a mixed bag – depending on the neighborhood. The one place that the commission did justice to the community was in Bellerose and Floral Park – we support the proposed map for the 23rd district; this district keeps Bellerose, Floral Park, Glen Oaks and Queens Village together.



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In Briarwood and Jamaica Hills, the Commission's proposed maps do an acceptable job of keeping the growing Bangladeshi community together. The Commission's proposed District 24 keeps these neighborhoods together for the most part but adjustments can be made to the southern boundary to keep it uniform along Jamaica Avenue.

Your worst efforts are in the Jackson Heights and Elmhurst cluster and in the Richmond Hill and South Ozone Park cluster.

In Jackson Heights you keep the northern part of the community, north of Northern Boulevard together but the southern part of the district in Elmhurst is splintered. The district can be drawn a number of ways to take into account the community that lives on both sides of Broadway.

Richmond Hill and South Ozone Park get the worst treatment in terms of the proposed lines. The Commission continues to use Lefferts Boulevard as a dividing line. Lefferts is at the heart of the neighborhood and continues to be used to split the neighborhood in two. Much is being said about the Commission's proposed district lines reducing the number of districts in this area from four to two. The proposed lines make changes at the edges of the neighborhood and do not go to the heart of the voter dilution problem.

Please stop using Lefferts as a boundary line. In Richmond Hill we request that the Eastern boundary be moved to the Van Wyck Expressway.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak and I welcome any questions you may have.

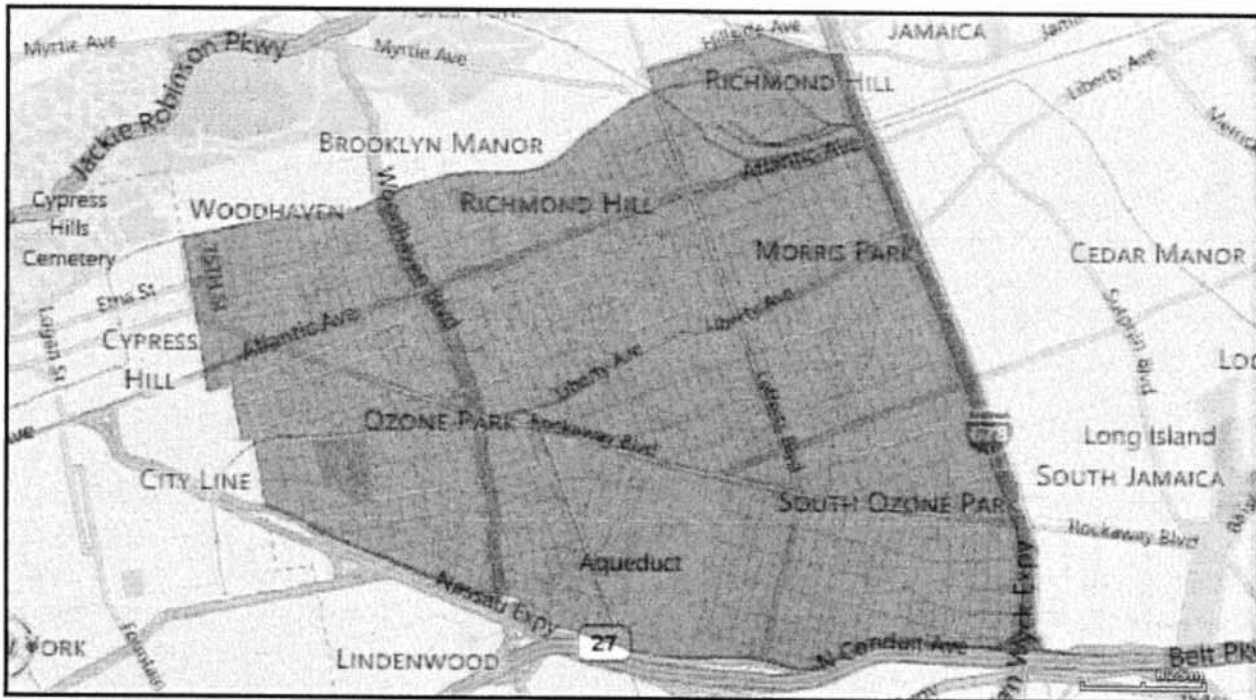


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Appendix 1: South Asian Neighborhood Clusters

Richmond Hill, Ozone Park, South Ozone Park Community of Interest



Boundaries: North: Jamaica Avenue to Hillside Avenue
 East: Van Wyck Expressway
 South: Belt Parkway
 West: Brooklyn-Queens County Line

Cluster Profile: The SAAs in this cluster are primarily Asian-Indian and Indo-Caribbean.

Total Population	192,000
White	11.9%
Black	15.3%
Hispanic	33.8%
Asian	23.6%
Other	14.5%

Compact: Yes, approximately 6 square miles; smooth boundary; rectangular in shape.

Contiguous: Yes.



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Community of Interest:

- 1) *Political Subdivisions:* Queens Community Boards 9 and 10.
- 2) *Local High Schools:*

Richmond Hill High School	Data for 2010-2011 School Year
Asian	34.1%
Black	16.0%
Hispanic	47.1%
White	2.4%

John Adams High School	Data for 2010-2011 School Year
Asian	28.2%
Black	29.3%
Hispanic	36.6%
White	4.4%

- 3) *Common Transportation Characteristics:*
 - a. Subway: J,Z line and A line;
 - b. Buses: Q7, Q8, Q10, Q11, Q21, Q24, Q37, Q41, Q53, Q56, Q110, QM15, QM 18, BM5.
 - c. Main Thoroughfares: Atlantic Avenue, Jamaica Avenue, Liberty Avenue, Woodhaven Boulevard.
 - d. Average Commute Time: 45 minutes¹

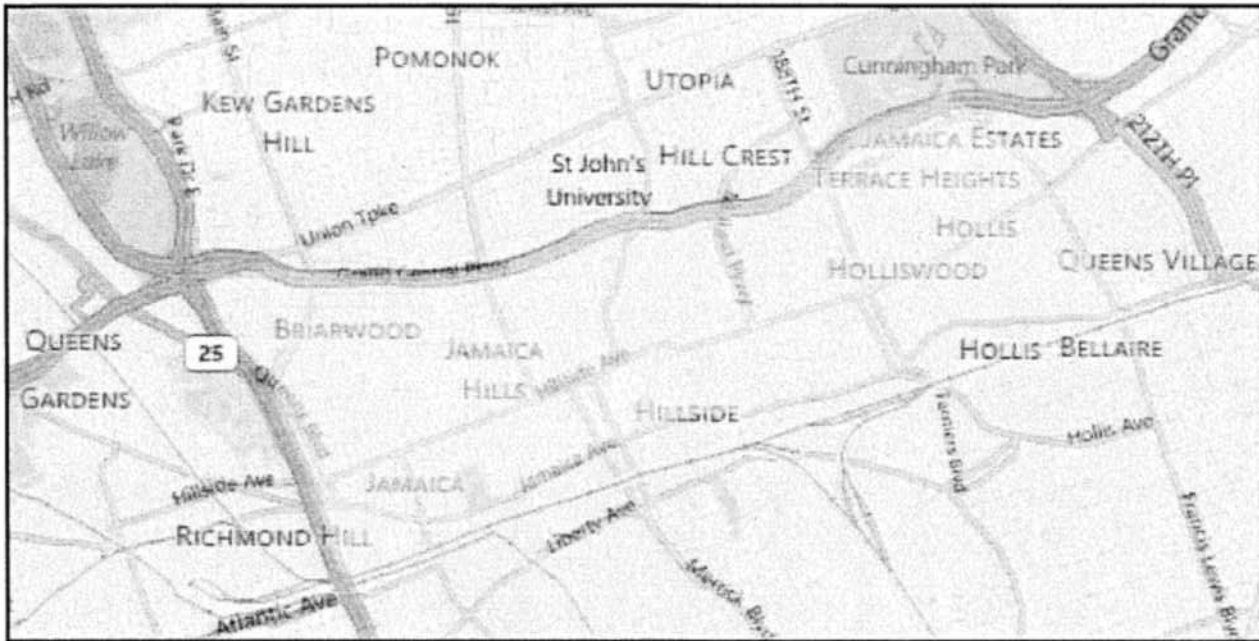
¹ 2000 Census Data for Richmond Hill; information for other neighborhoods in this cluster not available.



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Briarwood, Jamaica Hills, Jamaica Estates Community of Interest



Boundaries: North: Grand Central Parkway
 East: Francis Lewis Boulevard
 South: Jamaica Avenue & Long Island Railroad
 West: Van Wyck Expressway

Cluster Profile: The SAAs in this cluster are primarily are Asian-Indian, Bangladeshi-American and Indo-Caribbean.

Total Population	107,000
White	13.3%
Black	18.8%
Hispanic	28.1%
Asian	30.9%
Other	8.4%

Compact: Yes; approximately 3 square miles; smooth boundary; rectangular in shape.

Contiguous: Yes.



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Community of Interest:

- 1) *Political Subdivisions:* Queens Community Boards 8 and 12.
- 2) *Local High Schools:*

Hillcrest High School	Data for 2010-2011 School Year
Asian	34.1%
Black	40.1%
Hispanic	22.3%
White	2.6%

Jamaica High School	Data for 2010-2011 School Year
Asian	29.6%
Black	48.6%
Hispanic	20.7%
White	0.8%

- 3) *Common Transportation Characteristics:*
 - a. Subway: E and F Train
 - b. Buses: Q20a, Q20b, Q25, Q30, Q31, Q34, Q44, Q65. This cluster abuts the Jamaica-Archer Avenue Transportation Hub where a majority of Queens bus routes begin/terminate.
 - c. Main Thoroughfares: Grand Central Parkway, Hillside Avenue, Jamaica Avenue, Parsons Boulevard, Sutphin Boulevard.



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Bellrose, Queens Village, Floral Park, Glen Oaks



Boundaries: North: Grand Central Parkway
 East: Queens-Nassau County Line
 South: Jamaica Avenue – Hempstead Avenue
 West: Francis Lewis Boulevard

The Cluster Profile: The SAAs in this cluster are primarily Asian-Indian.

Total Population	79,000
White	27.5%
Black	14.5%
Hispanic	16.9%
Asian	32.8%
Other	7.9%

Compact: Yes, approximately 5 square miles; smooth boundary; trapezoidal in shape.

Contiguous: Yes.



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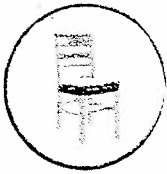
Community of Interest:

- 1) *Political Subdivisions:* Queens Community Board 13.
- 2) *Local High Schools*

Martin Van Buren High School	Data for 2010-2011 School Year
Asian	22.7%
Black	59.2%
Hispanic	14.9%
White	2.4%

Queens High School of Teaching	Data for 2010-2011 School Year
Asian	23.7%
Black	47.1%
Hispanic	15.7%
White	12.8%

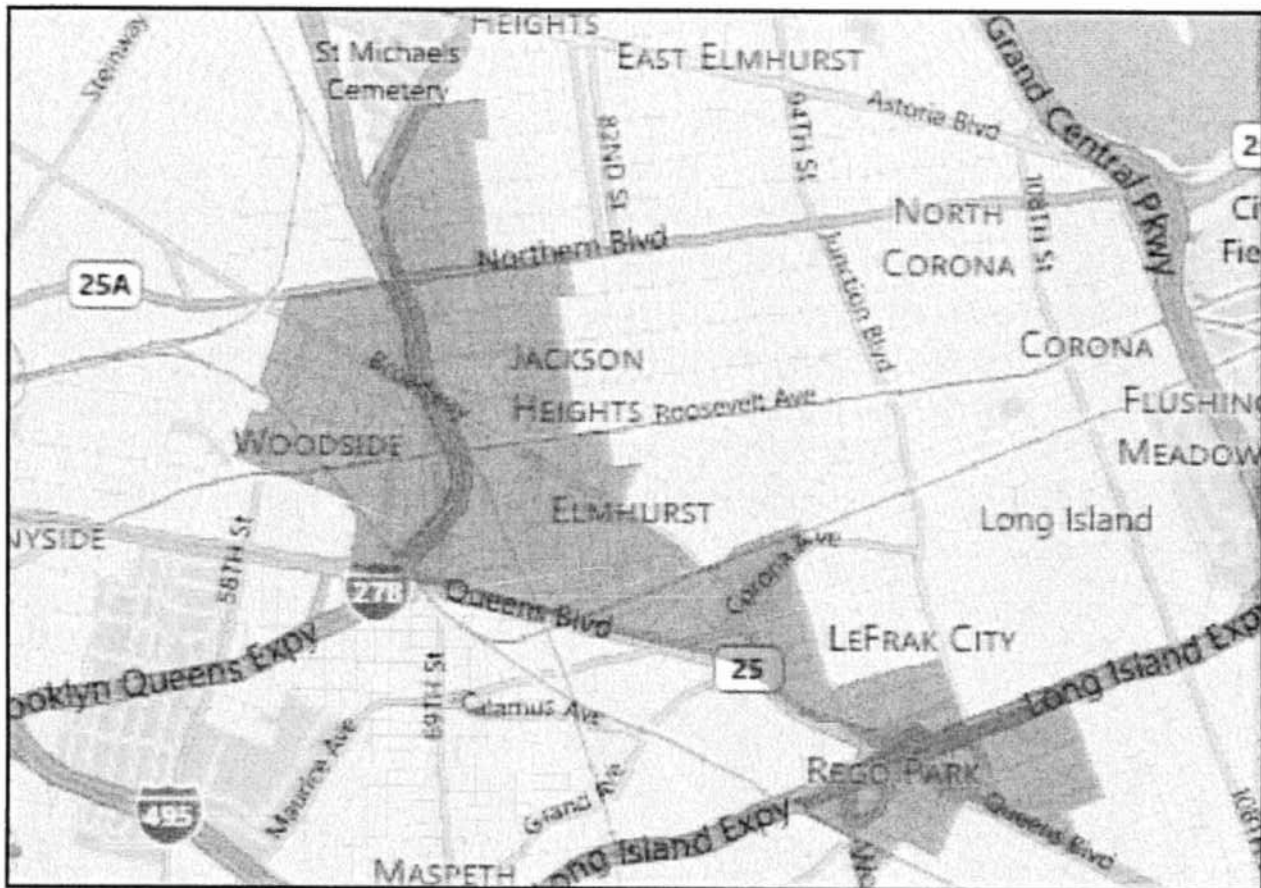
- 3) *Common Transportation Characteristics:*
 - a. Subway: None, bus routes connect commuters to E and F trains or Long Island Rail Road Queens Village Station.
 - b. Buses: Q1, Q27, Q43, Q46, Q76, Q88, X86, QM6, QM5, QM8, N1, N6, N24
 - c. Main Thoroughfares: Grand Central Parkway, Hillside Avenue, Jamaica Avenue, Francis Lewis Boulevard, Braddock Avenue, Springfield Boulevard.



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Jackson Heights, Elmhurst, Woodside and Rego Park



Boundaries: North: Irregular
East: Irregular
South: Primarily Queens Boulevard
West: Irregular

Since the boundaries are irregular, this cluster can be identified by the following census tracts: 247, 257, 259, 261, 263, 265, 267, 289, 287, 291, 293, 309.02, 483, 481, 471, 473, 485, 687, 683, 717.



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The Cluster Profile: The SAAs in this cluster are primarily Asian-Indian and Bangladeshi-American. There is an equally large East Asian population as well.

Total Population	81,500
White	15.7%
Black	1.4%
Hispanic	29.7%
Asian	50.3%
Other	2.8%

Compact: Yes, approximately 2 square miles; jagged boundaries; irregular in shape.

Contiguous: Yes.

Community of Interest

1) *Political Subdivisions:* Queens Community Boards 2, 3, 4 and 6.

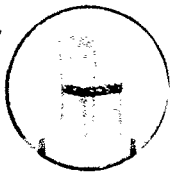
2) *Local High Schools*

Newtown High School	Data for 2010-2011 School Year
Asian	23.9%
Black	9.1%
Hispanic	61.4%
White	5.3%

High School for Arts and Business	Data for 2010-2011 School Year
Asian	9.3%
Black	8.3%
Hispanic	79.1%
White	2.9%

3) *Transportation:*

- Subway: 7, E, F, M, R.
- Buses: Q29, Q32, Q47, Q49, Q53, QM2, QM2a, QM3.
- Main Thoroughfares: Queens Boulevard, Roosevelt Avenue, Broadway, Northern Boulevard.



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New York City Districting Commission

Redistricting Hearing for Queens County

Testimony of
John P. Albert, Taking Our Seat

October 10, 2012

Good evening, my name is John P. Albert and I am with Taking Our Seat, a Queens- based non-partisan, civic organization. Taking Our Seat was founded to empower South Asian-Americans (SAA) in the electoral process by eliminating South Asian voter dilution. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to present my testimony.

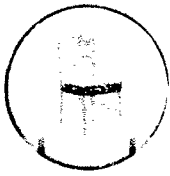
Taking Our Seat is a member of the ACCORD Coalition and Taking Our Seat stands strongly behind the proposed Unity Map.

According to the 2010 Census, there are 351,000 SAAs in New York City. This represents an increase of 61% over the past decade. Of these, nearly 60% reside in Queens County. The largest communities of SAAs are found in the following cluster of neighborhoods:

- Richmond Hill and South Ozone Park
- Briarwood and Jamaica Hills
- Jackson Heights and Elmhurst
- Bellerose and Floral Park
- Astoria and Long Island City

My testimony will focus on Richmond Hill. Currently, Richmond Hill and South Ozone Park are broken into 4 different Council districts. The Commission's draft proposal reduces this to two districts but that reduction does little to stop South Asian voter dilution. Just as the 2002 Commission did, this Districting Commission continues to use Lefferts Boulevard as a dividing line. Lefferts is at the heart of the Richmond Hill/ South Ozone Park neighborhoods and using the boulevard as a boundary continues split the neighborhood in half. The proposed lines make changes at the edges of the neighborhood and do not go to the heart of the voter dilution problem.

To remedy the problem Taking Our Seat has submitted proposed district lines solely for South East Queens. Our proposed map does not change our support for the Unity Map, which we



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seek to be passed in its entirety. Our proposal is a response to the Commission's own draft plan to demonstrate how small changes can bring better results for communities.

An illustration covering the Richmond Hill and South Ozone Park portion of the Taking Our Seat's proposal is attached, along with the narrative explanation of the suggested changes.

To summarize those changes:

- The Taking Our Seat plan moves the Lefferts Boulevard boundary between districts 28 and 32 east, to the Van Wyck Expressway, Lincoln Street and 131st Street. This captures the heart of the Richmond Hill/ South Ozone Park neighborhoods into one district. By doing so the Taking Our Seat plan creates a 32nd district that has an approximately 20% South Asian American population.

The residents of Richmond Hill and South Ozone park are not seeking to be a majority in this newly drawn district or seeking even to be plurality. All they are seeking is to be 20% of one district rather than 10% of two different districts.

- To account for the increase in population in District 32 due to the Lefferts Boulevard boundary moving east, the Taking Our Seat plan combines the Rockaway Peninsula into one district, District 31. The Rockaway peninsula is a singular community of interest based on common transportation lines (A Train), a common community board : CB 14; shared police precincts: 101st and 104th and the common schools: Far Rockaway High School, Beach Channel High School, Stella Maris High School and Scholars' Academy High School.

If the Commission proposes to split the Rockaways into two Council districts the burden is on the Commission to give a race-neutral reason for the split.

- Taking Our Seat's plan also keeps Cambria Heights in one district. The Districting Commission's proposed plan inexplicably splits Cambria Heights into two districts. The Taking Our Seat plan is true to the Districting Commission's own neighborhood boundaries – keeping neighborhoods whole within proposed districts.
- Racial composition of the districts in Taking Our Seat's plan are very similar to the Districting Commission's plan and do not violate the City Charter or the Voting Right Act. The spreadsheet attached to the letter outlines the demographic comparisons of the Taking Our Seat plan and the Districting Commission's proposed boundaries.



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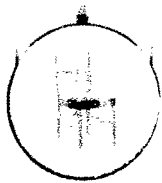
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- The Taking Our Seat plan protects incumbent interests. Although Taking Our Seat strongly opposes the use of redistricting to intentionally protect incumbent elected officials, we acknowledge that incumbency protection is a consideration in deliberations and key to securing the City Council's approval of the Commission's plan.

Of the four districts directly impacted by Taking Our Seat's plan, only one sitting Council member's district requires "protection." Taking Our Seat's plan protects the overall racial make-up of District 28. The remaining three Councilmembers representing districts 27, 31 and 32 are either term-limited or are seeking other elected office.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I hope that you listen to the community in keeping Richmond Hill and South Ozone Park united.



TAKING OUR SEAT

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October 5, 2012

The New York City
Districting Commission
253 Broadway
New York, NY 10007

Dear Districting Commission Members & Staff:

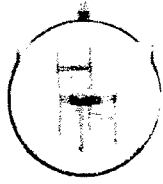
Recently, Taking Our Seat submitted a proposed City Council map to the Districting Commission. This letter accompanies that submission and provides the reasoning to Taking Our Seat's suggested changes to the Commission's recently proposed Council district maps.

Taking Our Seat is a Queens-based civic organization established to empower South Asian-American (SAA) neighborhoods in the electoral process by challenging SAA voter dilution. Taking Our Seat defines South Asian Americans as Americans who can trace their ancestry back to South Asia or to a South Asian diaspora to the Caribbean or Africa. South Asian Americans claim a heritage to countries like Bhutan, Bangladesh, Fiji, Guyana, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Surinam and Trinidad/Tobago.

Taking Our Seat's plan only impacts proposed district lines in Southern Queens. Taking Our Seat's plan keeps the Districting Commission's proposed boundaries for most other districts including highly concentrated SAA neighborhoods located in the 23rd, 24th and 25th districts in Queens. These districts encompass the SAA neighborhoods of Bellrose, Briarwood and Jackson Heights respectively. Although these boundaries are not ideal in some cases Taking Our Seat's plan is focused on remedying the most egregious and most patently unconstitutional dilution of South Asian American votes taking place in the neighborhoods of Richmond Hill and South Ozone Park. Taking Our Seat's plan focuses on Lefferts Boulevard, the current boundary between the 28th and 32nd districts, the same boundary employed by the Districting Commission's initial draft. Employing Lefferts Boulevard as a boundary line disenfranchises South Asian American voters.

The narrative below explains Taking Our Seat's changes to the Districting Commission's proposed draft to stop South Asian American voter dilution.

1) The Taking Our Seat plan moves the Lefferts Boulevard boundary between districts 28 and 32 east, to the Van Wyck Expressway, Lincoln Street and 131st Street. This simple move captures the heart of the Richmond Hill/ South Ozone Park neighborhoods into one district. By doing so the Taking Our Seat plan creates a 32nd district that has an approximately 20% South Asian American population.



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The residents of Richmond Hill and South Ozone park are not seeking to be a majority in this newly drawn district or seeking even to be plurality. All they are seeking is to be 20% of one district rather than 10% of two different districts.

2) To account for the increase in population in District 32 due to the Lefferts Boulevard boundary moving east, the Taking Our Seat plan combines the Rockaway Peninsula into one district, District 31.

The Rockaway peninsula is a singular community of interest based on common transportation lines (A Train), a common community board : CB 14; shared police precincts: 101st and 104th and the common schools: Far Rockaway High School, Beach Channel High School, Stella Maris High School and Scholars' Academy High School.

An even more stark unifying characteristic of the Rockaways is that every single resident lives in either Hurricane Evacuation Zone A or Zone B as deemed by the City of New York. This means that the entire Rockaways peninsula faces a high risk of flooding from a hurricane's storm surge. Nature has placed everyone in the peninsula into the same lot and so should the Districting Commission.

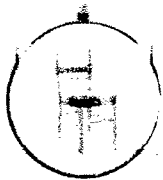
If the Commission proposes to split the Rockaways into two Council districts the burden is on the Commission to give a race-neutral reason for the split.

3) Taking Our Seat's plan also keeps Cambria Heights in one district. The Districting Commission's proposed plan inexplicably splits Cambria Heights into two districts. The Taking Our Seat plan is true to the Districting Commission's own neighborhood boundaries – keeping neighborhoods whole within proposed districts.

4) The Taking Our Seat plan protects incumbent interests. Although Taking Our Seat strongly opposes the use of redistricting to intentionally protect incumbent elected officials, we acknowledge that incumbency protection is a consideration in the Commission's deliberations and key to securing the City Council's approval of the Commission's plan.

Of the four districts directly impacted by Taking Our Seat's plan, only one sitting Council member's district requires "protection." Taking Our Seat's plan protects the overall racial make-up of District 28. The remaining three Councilmembers representing districts 27, 31 and 32 are either term-limited or are seeking other elected office

5) Racial composition of the districts in Taking Our Seat's plan are very similar to the Districting Commission's plan and do not violate the City Charter or the Voting Right Act, please see the



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attached spreadsheet for the demographic comparisons of the Taking Our Seat plan and the Districting Commission's proposed boundaries.

The result of the Taking Our Seat plan are districts which keep neighborhoods whole and communities of interest together while remedying South Asian voter dilution. The newly drawn 32nd district is a true multicultural district that reflects the mosaic that is Queens County in 2012.

Thank you in advance for your careful consideration of the Taking Our Seat plan. We appreciate the ease of the process in submitting our proposal and the helpfulness of the Districting Commission staff. Please contact me at jalbert@takingourseat.org if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

John P. Albert

John P. Albert
Board Chair
Taking Our Seat



The South Asian Voice in Redistricting

Attachment 1.

Demographic Comparisons of The Taking Our Seat Plan v. The Districting Commission's Draft Plan

	Total Population	Deviation	% Deviation	NH White	% NH White	NH_Black	% NH_Black	Hispanic	% Hispanic	NH_Asian	% NH_Asian
Taking Our Seats Proposed 27th District	159,186	-1,524	-0.95%	2,630	1.65%	115,042	72.27%	21,706	13.64%	11,185	7.03%
Districting Commission's Proposed 27th District	156,683	-4,027	-2.50%	2,616	1.70%	112,403	71.70%	21,819	13.90%	11,217	7.20%
Taking Our Seats Proposed 28th District	154,634	-6,076	-3.78%	5,520	3.57%	99,142	64.11%	28,748	18.59%	11,287	7.30%
Districting Commission's Proposed 28th District	159,645	-1,065	-0.70%	5,005	3.10%	80,880	50.70%	29,252	18.30%	24,027	15.10%
Taking Our Seat's Proposed 31st District	152,920	-7,790	-4.85%	42,164	27.57%	75,343	49.27%	27,615	18.06%	3,407	2.23%
Districting Commission's Proposed 31st District	155,094	-5,616	-3.50%	17,113	11.00%	104,953	67.70%	25,581	16.50%	2,764	1.80%
Taking Our Seat's Proposed 32nd District	163,827	3,117	1.94%	36,269	22.14%	22,512	13.74%	43,653	26.65%	35,854	21.89%
Districting Commission's Proposed 32nd District	156,426	-4,284	-2.70%	61,683	39.40%	13,501	8.60%	43,504	27.80%	23,305	14.90%

Note: The reduction in the % of Black residents of District 31 is balanced by the increase of the % of Black residents in District 28, thereby protecting the African American incumbent in district 28 - the only district where an incumbent needs protection.

Taking Our Seat's Proposed Map for Dist 28 & Dist 32

