



Asian Americans for Equality

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Testimony for Brooklyn Redistricting Commission

My name is Christopher Kui and I am the Executive Director of Asian Americans For Equality, a citywide social service organization with housing development, homeownership lending, and small business development capabilities targeting a main client base of NYC's Asian and Asian American residents. Thank you for this opportunity to testify before the Brooklyn redistricting hearings.

As a representative of AAFE, we have seen a tremendous increase of our Asian and Asian American constituents in the borough of Brooklyn, so that throughout southern Brooklyn we are seeing neighborhoods with upwards of 40% increases in Asian residents, numbering roughly 284,000 people in the last American Community Survey. In our own study published last year called "Distinct Places, Shared Opportunity", AAFE found that of the over 1 million Asian residents in the City, almost 75% live in 20 community board districts that have over 12% Asian pluralities. In 9 of these districts, Asians make up more than 25% of the population.

Within Brooklyn, many neighborhoods fall within these 20 districts, such as Sunset Park, Bensonhurst, Bay Ridge, Dyker Heights, Sheepshead Bay, Borough Park, Kensington and Midwood, just to name a few. In places like Bensonhurst, 1 in 3 residents are of Asian descent. Brooklyn's Sunset Park is a US Census Asian Neighborhood Tabulation Area with 53% of the residents being Asian.

Meanwhile, opportunities for political representation have not kept pace with population growth, with no elected official of Asian descent in Brooklyn when compared to Manhattan and Queens. It is imperative that we allow for such opportunities arise by ensuring that the districts reflect changes in demographics so that all New Yorkers are adequately represented. With a borough population of 284,000 and growing, Asian American New Yorkers should have one or two elected officials in Brooklyn in the coming decade.

This must not be done at the expense of other groups, but achieved in an informed manner where Asians can have elected representation while protecting the political will and aspirations of other minority groups in the borough. Haphazardly lumping Asians with other large minority plurality districts will only foster division and pit underrepresented groups against each other.

A better path would be one similar to what happened in Lower Manhattan, where the previous Redistricting Commission, with tremendous foresight created three Districts (1, 2, and 3), so that major pluralities were able to achieve political representation without impinging on each other. Today, we have Margaret Chin, Rosie Mendez, and Christine

Quinn: an Asian American, a Latina, and a woman of LGBT background, representing their major demographic constituents without doing so at each others expense.

AAFE feels strongly that this is achievable for City Council Redistricting in Brooklyn. For example, based on population studies already done by NYC-based Common Cause, we are seeing a tremendous increase in Asian residents in parts of Bensonhurst and its surrounding neighborhoods, which can be made into an Asian-plurality district much like Chinatown Lower East Side in Manhattan, and Flushing in Queens. It makes no sense to continue to have Staten Island take on parts of southern Brooklyn, which has a sufficient population to sustain its own three districts, leaving more of an opportunity for an equitable reconfiguration that takes into account increases by the Asian population. We urge the Commission to follow the example set by the NY State Assembly in re-drawing the boundaries of the 49th State Assembly District, which proposed a 51 percent majority Asian district which incorporated much of Dyker Heights and Bensonhurst in order to increase the possibility for electoral representation by the Asian American community in the NY State Assembly.

In closing, we urge the Commission to closely study and analyze the population data, work diligently and creatively to ensure that the City Council representation hopes and aspirations of 280,000 Asian Americans living in Brooklyn can be fulfilled in the coming decade.