

Statement of Bright Limm, Korean Americans for Political Advancement, to the New York City Districting Commission

My name is Bright Limm, and I am testifying today in my capacity as Board President and Steering Committee Chair of Korean Americans for Political Advancement (KAPA). The recommendations I will present at today's hearing concern both guiding principles and adjustments to Council Districts 19, 20, and 23.

About KAPA

KAPA is a nonprofit advocacy and political organization with dues-paying members residing predominantly in Queens and Manhattan. Through our advocacy and political activities, we have knocked on thousands of doors throughout northeastern Queens – particularly in Flushing, Bayside, Murrary Hill, Auburndale, and Fresh Meadows – and have met with elected officials, business associations, and other community leaders throughout this region.

Redistricting is priority policy area for KAPA, and for over a year we have worked together with over a dozen organizations on state legislative and congressional districting matters as a member organization of ACCORD, the Asian American Community Coalition on Redistricting and Democracy. KAPA now joins with its fellow ACCORD members again to advocate for fair City Council districts.

Recommendations

Guiding principles. Like the other members of ACCORD, KAPA recognizes that the Districting Commission's top consideration must be one of compliance with existing legal mandates. Within this legal framework, KAPA believes that the next most important consideration should be the identification and protection of communities of interest. In order to identify communities of common interest in northeastern Queens, KAPA believes that common language, socioeconomic, housing, citizenship/immigration status and commercial characteristics ought to be accorded the greatest weight.

In identifying what communities of interest exist in northeastern Queens, KAPA strongly recommends that the Commission utilize the excellent fieldwork and analysis performed by the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF), which is also a member organization of the ACCORD coalition. As a fellow member of ACCORD, KAPA has had an opportunity to see in advance the findings and analysis presented by AALDEF at both the Brooklyn hearing and at today's hearing. We find AALDEF's methodology to be rigorous and its conclusions fully in accord with KAPA's own demographic research and fieldwork.

Council Districts 19, 20, and 23. KAPA's positions regarding Council Districts 19, 20, and 23 are simple: we ask that the Commission draw these three districts in such a way that:

- (1) Flushing, as defined in AALDEF's "Asian American Neighborhood Boundaries" document, is kept within one Council district (i.e., Council District 20); and that

- (2) Bayside, as defined in AALDEF's "Asian American Neighborhood Boundaries" document, is kept within one Council district (i.e., Council District 19).

I should point out specifically that under the Neighborhood Boundaries document, the small neighborhood of Oakland Gardens is included as part of the "Bayside" community of interest. Currently, Oakland Gardens is part of the 23rd Council District. We believe that it should be part of the 19th District for the following reasons:

- (a) Oakland Gardens has seen a recent influx of East Asian immigrant residents with characteristics that are very similar to those in neighboring Council District 19. Specifically, these new residents are mostly middle-class, home-owning families whose heads of household often are of limited English proficiency. Many, if not most, of these immigrants speak only Korean or Mandarin with proficiency. As someone who works with families in Oakland Gardens every week, I can also tell you from first-hand experience that many Korean American families attend the same churches and after-school programs as families in "Bayside proper," as the latter is defined by the Department of City Planning.
- (b) Over the past ten or so years, the growing Korean American voting population in northeastern Queens has exhibited increasing political cohesion, not only in voter data but also in Korean-language press and other media. The 2009 City Council election was a recent example of this cohesion, with record numbers of Korean American voters turning out to help candidate Kevin Kim win the Democratic Primary. Another recent example of political cohesion is the 2010 General Election for State Senate District 11, in which, according to an exit poll by the MinKwon Center for Community Action, almost 90% of Korean voters who went to the polls voted for Democratic candidate and now-Senator Tony Avella. Based on their common characteristics with these voters, Korean American voters in Oakland Gardens are likely to vote in a manner similar to those in Bayside, Bayside Hills, and perhaps even the rest of Council District 19.
- (c) The Long Island Expressway (I-495) serves as a sensible physical border between Districts 19 and 23 in that area.

I thank the members of the Commission very much for your consideration and hope that the Commission will incorporate these recommendations into its preliminary and final maps.