

New York City Council
Redistricting Commission
Wednesday, October 10, 2012
Testimony of Vishnu Mahadeo
Richmond Hill Economic Development Council

Good afternoon honorable panel:

My name is Vishnu Mahadeo and I am the president of the Richmond Hill Economic Development Council – Richmond Hill EDC which is the defacto Indo Caribbean Chamber of Commerce and Social umbrella. The RICHMOND HILL EDC is a not-for-profit organization of merchants, business people, service providers, elected officials and other community members working together to advance the business, cultural, social, educational and civic welfare of the South East Neighborhood of Queens; Richmond Hill, South Ozone Park and Ozone Park.

Who is an Indo Caribbean? Indo Caribbeans are a community of about 500,000 people in the USA (see attachment) who have come from India to the Caribbean since 1838, and made a second migration to the USA starting about 50 years ago. Although we come mainly from Guyana, Trinidad & Tobago and Suriname, we have a distinct mixture of Indian-Caribbean culture and heritage with a distinctive and pronounced Indian influence. There are over 150000 in queens alone and approximately 50,000 in the Richmond Hill / South Ozone Park / Ozone Park area. Despite these numbers, there is no Indo Caribbean in the City Council or in the New York State Assembly or in the NYS Senate or in the US Congress. The reason is simple, Gerrymandering.

The Indo Caribbean people have been split into 6 NYS Assembly Districts (AD 23,24, 27,31,32 & 38) and 4 City Council Districts (CO 28,29,30 & 32). This has diluted the Indo Caribbean vote and prevented any Indo Caribbean candidate from winning a seat. This willful splitting of communities of common interest has created a system of disenfranchisement for the Indo Caribbean community as their votes are less effective or ineffective. Gerrymandering for the purpose of insuring minority representation has been upheld by the United States Supreme Court. The present form of Gerrymandering is in violation of the Supreme Court ruling as it is depriving a minority from representation. Due to our lack of any political power we are a community paying the highest per square foot taxes in Queens. We have the worst High Schools in Queens (Richmond Hill High School and John Adams High School) not on behavior issues but on poor academic performance with its over-crowding a major contributor. We are significant

contributors to all the local Political Leaders yet a small or negligible fraction of discretionary funds comes to the Indo Caribbean community. At present both the city, state and federal government are in violation of the Voting Act, as the Indo Caribbean community has purposely been deprived of any representation.

I call upon this august body to correct this injustice, or we will be forced to bring this matter to the courts.

Recommendation:

I am also calling on this **New York City Council Redistricting Commission** to use the boundaries of on the East - Van Wyck Expressway, on the West – Woodhaven Blvd., on the South – Belt Parkway and on the North – Hillside/Jamaica Avenues. This will allow our community a true voice in the New York City Council.

I thank you for this opportunity to present to the City Council Legislative Task Force on behalf of the Indo Caribbean community. I am happy to answer your questions.

Thank you

Vishnu Mahadeo