

Make the Road New York Testimony
Nassau County Districting Commission

September 9th, 2022

My name is Angel Reyes Rivas and I am the Long Island Organizing Coordinator for Make the Road New York, the largest grassroots organization of immigrants and working-class people of color in New York. On Long Island we organize in Nassau and Suffolk County. Most of our Nassau members live in the Westbury and New Cassel area. Our 25,000 members across the state, build the power of our communities to achieve dignity and justice through organizing, policy innovation, transformative education, and survival services. I submit this testimony to share the organization's perspective on redistricting.

Increasing civic engagement is a critical part of our work. We conduct outreach continuously to ensure community members' voices are heard. In the 2020 census, we led in-person, phone, and digital outreach that reached hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers. Our members participated in that process to make certain that our communities receive both adequate resources and representation. In the last redistricting cycle in Nassau, we were active participants in a coalition effort to demand fair representation for communities of color.

Our members' calls for fair maps were not heeded by the county's leadership last time, and we urge you now to correct the mistakes of the past.

To achieve such representation, we need a redistricting process that is transparent, fair, and reflects the geographic realities and growing numbers of our communities. We urge this body to ensure that people of color are represented in the process by:

1. Respecting one person, one vote;
2. Refraining from abusive line-drawing, especially "cracking" and "packing";
3. Respecting political subdivisions and communities of interest, especially for long-underrepresented immigrant, Black, and brown communities;
4. Ensuring compactness and contiguity; and
5. Prioritizing public participation and transparency.

We urge you to take seriously the input of community members and organizations--especially those in historically underrepresented communities.

Nassau County has a deeply troubling history of “cracking” and “packing” communities of color in the redistricting process to both disenfranchise our communities and ensure the political advantage of one party. We urge the commission not to repeat the mistakes of the past.

Though we are not submitting any recommendations for specific maps and lines, we do find it very troubling that we do not have any public hearings programmed in the Westbury/New Cassel area. Most of our Nassau County members reside in the Westbury area, and many of them rely solely on public transportation. By holding the Town of North Hempstead hearing in the Manhasset area, the commission is making it difficult for immigrant communities and communities of color to have their voices heard during such an important county process. These communities will be impacted the most by the outcomes and decisions from this redistricting process.

Our communities are watching and demand justice in this process.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Please contact me at angel.reyes@maketheroadny.org if you have any questions.