

October 30, 2021

New Jersey Office of Legislative Services
New Jersey Congressional Redistricting Commission
State House Annex
131-137 W State St
Trenton, NJ 08608

To Members of the New Jersey Congressional Redistricting Commission

My name is Hannah Korn-Heilner and I currently reside in South Orange and was born and raised in Montclair. I am here today to echo the testimony made last Saturday by Imani Oakley, who is running for Congress in the 10th congressional district, on the plan to redistrict sections of Montclair in the 10th congressional district into the 11th congressional district. As someone who has grown up in Montclair, I have seen first hand how the South End, a historically Black neighborhood, has been marginalized and forgotten. Gentrification has raised housing prices and pushed out Black residents and the only grocery store in the neighborhood was removed five years ago and has still not been replaced, leaving residents in a food desert. The South End deserves representation that is reflective of their neighborhood and prioritizes their needs. To redistrict this community into the 11th district, a district that is whiter and significantly wealthier, continues to take their power away and further marginalizes them.

Additionally, redistricting the historically Black section of Montclair where Imani lives into the 11th congressional district would pit Imani, a Black woman, against Mikie Sherrill, a white woman. Women have been underrepresented in Congress, especially in New Jersey where currently only two of our fourteen federal representatives are women. To redistrict Imani's neighborhood into Sherrill's district would further limit opportunities to increase female representation, especially for women of color.

This redistricting, if it occurs seemingly deliberately while Imani is running a competitive primary for the 10th district, will feel like another shameful day for New Jersey and a reminder of the continued presence of the same-old corrupt New Jersey boys club. I urge this commission to keep the South End of Montclair in the 10th congressional district or with its sister communities in East Orange and in Newark to ensure its residents have fair representation that will reflect their interests in Congress.

Sincerely,

Hannah Korn-Heilner

South Orange, NJ 07079

NADIA RUSH TESTIMONY

10/30/2021

Hi, my name is Nadia Rush and I live and work in Belleville, Essex County. I am here to testify about important features of my community and to urge you to keep it together in the next round of maps.

My community is largely made up of Hispanic and Black families that lived in the area for generations. My community is growing in a very positive way, I see a lot of new home buyers relocating to our area. It is great to see new families planting roots in our community.

Many of us visit the same local church as the River of Life Assembly of God and Saint Peter's Roman Catholic Church. The community also goes to the same movie theaters, malls, and local restaurants that represent the diversity of different cultures. Belleville and my community are well known for their Cherry Blossoms. As a fun fact, every spring, residents and visitors alike can see the largest cherry blossom collection in the United States. Branch Brook Park, which runs through Belleville and Newark, has more than 2,700 Japanese cherry blossom trees that burst into full bloom during the annual Essex County

We have a large hospital in the area, Clara Mass that is very accessible to our community, which we are very proud of.

My community is bordered by Nutley to the north, Newark to the south, Route 21 and Passaic River to the east, and Bloomfield to the west.

We are relatively close to Met Life Stadium at Rutherford, NJ, and Red Bull Arena Harrison, NJ. In addition, we are close to educational buildings as Rutgers University, and NJ IT, both located in downtown Newark. We really value being close to so many wonderful institutions.

My community is in the 8th Congressional District and the 29th Legislative District.

Some of the issues that are most important to us are education, public safety, and healthcare. We are very proud of our public schools. Almost all the kids from my community attend Belleville High School. However, we are lacking in public safety infrastructure. Currently, we have a high rate of crime in our area. Adequate representation is important to us because we would like the government to help with local public safety measure infrastructure needs.

Our community is a lot like Kearny, NJ, Harrison, NJ, Lyndhurst, NJ, other diverse suburbs in the area – many of which are already in the 8th Congressional District with us.

We don't have a lot of similarities with the less diverse or more rural areas of the state to the north and west.

To sum this all up, the wider Belleville area is a tight-knit community with deep roots in the area, and we hope to continue to be represented together in the new district maps.

I thank the Committee for listening to me today and ask that you keep my community together when drawing new maps to the extent it is possible, without diluting the voting power of Hispanic and other communities of color, violating the law, or violating fair redistricting principles. Again, thank you.

Judge Wallace and Esteemed Committee Members,

Thank you for allowing me a moment to speak with you on the important subject of Congressional Redistricting as related to our New Jersey LGBTQ Community. I'm Lauren Albrecht and I wear several different hats- that of engaged politico on the County, State and National level, that of professional policy advocate, and my personal roles as a wife, daughter, sister and friend. By far my most rewarding and challenging role is that of representative of, and advocate for, the LGBTQ Community. Seizing on this once-per-decade opportunity to increase LGBTQ representation, we are here to make the statement that in the same vein as communities of interest in regards to race, ethnicity and economic standing, our communities' concerns are heard louder when we can speak as a collective voice, and when our voice is diluted by splitting up areas of LGBTQ-concentrated communities, we are more likely to suffer systemic erasure, which, unfortunately for us, often results in the removal of our legally-protected rights in military service, healthcare, workforce, education, housing, and basically every metric by which the success of a community is measured. I'd like to highlight for you some of the glaring disparities that exist between LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ residents of America: at least 31% of transgender people have considered attempting suicide, 3 times more than their non-LGBTQ counterparts. 46% of LGBTQ people still report being closeted in the workplace, right now, in 2021. Fewer than .3 percent of Fortune 500 board directors are openly LGBTQ, as of last year. 17% of lgbtq respondents of a poll by HRC lost their jobs amid coronavirus pandemic, compared to 13% of the non-lgbtq population.

Where I live in Wall Township, in Congressional District 4, is probably not home to any large population of LGBTQ residents (again though, it's nearly impossible to tell when the data relies on arriving at conclusions instead of seeing census numbers), but our Districtmate communities of Neptune Township, and specifically its' Ocean Grove section, are home to much larger communities of LGBTQ residents, much more akin to its neighboring town of Asbury Park. Asbury Park is located currently in Congressional District 6, represented by Congressman Pallone, and it is for the inclusion of Neptune Township in this district that I am advocating today, so that large areas of LGBTQ community can be joined together again, as they previously were in the past.

I sincerely thank you for taking the time to hear this testimony.

Lauren Albrecht

Wall Twp, NJ 07719

Hi, my name is Teresa Brown.

I live in Union Township, and I am here to testify about important features of my community.

My community is a very diverse suburb with mixed-income families and lots of working-class people. Union Township boasts great ethnic and racial diversity, which is one of the reasons that I chose to buy a home and move my family here over 15 years ago. The ethnic makeup of my community includes residents from Brazil, Africa, Italy, India, Ireland, Peru, Portugal, Poland, Germany, and the Caribbean. We are referred to as a "minority-majority" town and share a melting pot of different languages and cultures. My community has many religious houses of worship and many faith-based, civil, and social organizations.

According to Money.com, my community is ranked #13 in Best Places to Live in Union County and the 43rd Best Place to live in America. We are incredibly proud of our highly rated public school system and the world-class educational icon Kean University. Even with these accolades, historically, redlining has created significant disparities between the North and South parts of the community. The North section of Union has significantly more residents of color than the rest of the township.

My community includes Union Center and Route 22 retail commerce. Union Center is a hub of ethnic restaurants and shops and a central location for social gatherings and public transportation. While Route 22 has a wide array of convenient retail shopping options and easy access to the Garden State Parkway.

My community is split between the 7th and 10th Congressional Districts and is in the 20th Legislative District. The Congressional split disproportionately affects the northern section of my community, which is predominately residents of color.

Some of the issues important to my community are education, safety, infrastructure, and affordability. Over the past few years, my community has grown significantly with lots of new construction, development, and a steady influx of new residents coming in and buying homes. We have an increase in families with small children and millennials migrating to my community. As development continues, the population of my community will continue to grow.

We are already experiencing overcrowding, which is impacting traffic patterns and public area parking. My community could use government support to help make sure we have enough schools, well-maintained roads, and other infrastructure to meet the new demands. We could also use help in keeping the community affordable – particularly for the working class.

We have a proud legacy of family values. However, many of our up-and-coming families cannot afford to remain in the community, as the boom in development has pushed prices way up. The development of luxury rentals has outpriced the affordability for longstanding residents and their families. Concerns about taxes, affordability, and sustainability are critical issues for all the residents of my community.

Although we have many urgent care facilities and professional medical services; we must travel for miles for a full-service hospital. We have an emergency room and a satellite facility of Overlook Hospital, but we don't have a full-service hospital of our own.

I believe that the Federal government can help ensure that our community has the infrastructure needed as we grow to keep the area affordable for the diverse groups of people who have called Union home for many years. Currently, because we are split, we don't have one direct representative to go to for help, so we cannot speak with a united voice. Putting all of Union Township within one district would allow for more focused attention for federal funding and the allocation of essential resources to align with my community's needs as it grows.

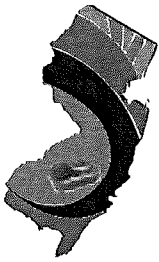
Finally, to sum up my testimony, I live in a unique community that is dissimilar to any of our bordering neighbors when it comes to diversity. With expanding development, we need more schools, more public services, and more infrastructure to mitigate issues related to growth.

Some areas of my community have clear racial bias separations, as indicated by the Congressional district mapping split between District #7 and District #10.

Please do not diminish the voting strength of our residents of color but instead empower them with fair mapping considerations.

I thank the committee for listening to me today and ask that they keep my community together when drawing new maps and consider bringing North Union into the greater community of Union Township to empower all residents with voting power for representation and funding.

Again, thank you.



NEW JERSEY LEGISLATIVE BLACK CAUCUS

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October 29, 2021

Redistricting Commission Testimony
Assemblywoman Shavonda Sumter
Chair of the Legislative Black Caucus

I would first like to thank the individuals who have accepted the most critical position of serving on the Redistricting Commission. As a citizen, whose legislative district was designed to be a full minority district during the 2010 Census, I am hyper-aware of the gravity of the pivotal decisions made by the panel and their impact on the future of legislative representation in New Jersey. I want to take this opportunity to congratulate the residents who took time during the pandemic to complete the Census. Also, a special thanks to members of the NJ Legislative Black Caucus who amplified the critical importance of a complete count; denounced the myths; and pushed through the barriers in hard-to-count areas across the state in partnership with countless civic organizations and individuals.

As a result of all of the efforts, the Census count revealed growth in New Jersey's population over the last ten years. Having nearly a complete count of New Jersey residents will mean that many of our most impacted areas will receive the appropriate and necessary funding resources reflective of our communities. Moving forward, this reapportionment is crucial to ensuring all New Jersey communities are fairly represented in the State House over the next ten years. The overlays of an increase in the Black diaspora, Hispanic Latinx and Asian populations mandate strong consideration is given to creating opportunities for cultural inclusion in the 40 state legislative districts. We want to be certain to avoid the pitfalls of the past where maps undermined communities of color, were divisive to communities' interest and with priorities given to non-minority majorities to maintain legislative seats for generations.

The Covid-19 pandemic revealed the many structural and systemic challenges faced by communities of color today. We worked tirelessly with partners to highlight the necessity to bring testing and vaccines to families; for housing moratoriums to stem evictions and homelessness; and support for families with unemployed workers and facing food insecurity. We further had to double-down on acquiring access to technology and broadband for students and schools during the year of virtual learning.

It is our hope that as we look to the future with hope for tomorrow, that our communities may elect a citizen of their peers to serve in the legislature and champion their local needs for school funding, municipal aid and policy changes. Trusting the community to elect a representative who will have a seat at the table to voice their interest, creates a true democracy.

As you go through this significant process, we continue to request transparency and solicited public engagement in this most critical civic exercise. We anticipate the submission of a State Legislative District map which reflects the growth and diversity of New Jersey. A map that gives communities of color opportunities to see themselves in their representation in the Statehouse, one who represents their interest and needs of their families and neighborhoods.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony.

Shavonda Sumter, Chair
New Jersey Legislative Black Caucus