
Commission Meeting

of

NEW JERSEY CONGRESSIONAL REDISTRICTING COMMISSION

*“Testimony from the public on the establishment of Congressional districts in New Jersey
that will be in effect for the next 10 years”*

LOCATION: West Hall
Middlesex College
Edison, New Jersey

DATE: November 13, 2021
10:00 a.m.

MEMBERS OF COMMISSION PRESENT:

Honorable John E. Wallace, Jr., Chair

Janice Fuller, Democratic Delegation Chair

Iris Delgado

Senator Vin Gopal

Stephanie Lagos

Jeff Nash

Dana Redd

Doug Steinhardt, Esq., Republican Delegation Chair

Jeanne Dovgala Ashmore

Mark Duffy

Mark LoGrippe

Lynda Pagliughi



ALSO PRESENT:

Raysa Martinez Kruger

Office of Legislative Services

Commission Secretary

Jessica Oestreicher

Roshard Williams

Office of Legislative Services

Commission Aides

***Meeting Recorded and Transcribed by
The Office of Legislative Services, Public Information Office,
Hearing Unit, State House Annex, PO 068, Trenton, New Jersey***

DEMOCRATIC MEMBERS

Janice Fuller
Delegation Chair

Iris Delgado
Vin Gopal
Stephanie Lagos
Jeff Nash
Dana Redd



REPUBLICAN MEMBERS

Doug Steinhardt
Delegation Chair

Michele Albano
Jeanne Ashmore
Mark Duffy
Mark LoGripipo
Lynda Pagliughi

NEW JERSEY CONGRESSIONAL
REDISTRICTING COMMISSION

STATE HOUSE ANNEX • P.O. BOX 068 • TRENTON, NJ 08625-0068

John E. Wallace, Jr.
Chair

REDISTRICTING COMMISSION NOTICE

TO: MEMBERS OF THE REDISTRICTING COMMISSION
FROM: JOHN E. WALLACE, JR. – CHAIR
SUBJECT: **REDISTRICTING COMMISSION MEETING – NOVEMBER 13, 2021**

The public may address comments and questions to Raysa Martinez Kruger, Commission Secretary, or make scheduling inquiries to Sophie Love, Secretary, at (609)847-3890 or email: OLSAideREDC@njleg.org. Written and electronic comments, questions and testimony submitted to the Commission by the public, as well as recordings and transcripts, if any, of oral testimony, are government records and will be available to the public upon request.

The Redistricting Commission will meet on Saturday, November 13, 2021 at 10:00 AM at Middlesex County College, 2600 Woodbridge Avenue, Edison, New Jersey, 08818. The meeting will take place in West Hall, located at the corner of College Drive East and Park Side Drive.

The purpose of the meeting will be to take testimony from the public on the establishment of congressional districts in New Jersey that will be in effect for the next 10 years.

Members of the public may view the proceedings via the New Jersey Legislature home page at <https://www.njleg.state.nj.us/> or via the Commission's home page at <https://www.njredistrictingcommission.org/default.asp>.

Those wishing to testify may register online in advance of the meeting at <https://www.njredistrictingcommission.org/schedule.asp>. Registration is also available at <https://www.njleg.state.nj.us/>. Select November 13 on the calendar and click on Redistricting Commission for the registration link. Advance registrations must be received by Friday, November 12, 2021 at 3:00 PM. Upon successful registration, you will view a printable receipt on screen.

Registration will also be available on site. To ensure that all who wish to testify can do so, the Chair will limit public testimony to 5 minutes per person. Extra time will be allotted for those needing the assistance of a translator.

(OVER)

If you require language interpretation services to testify, please contact the Office of Legislative Services at (609) 847-3890 to discuss and arrange for interpretation services in advance of the meeting.

You may also submit written testimony instead of, or in addition to, oral testimony by email to OLSaideREDC@njleg.org. If providing written testimony in addition to oral testimony at the meeting, please bring 17 copies for distribution to Commission members. Written testimony will be included in the Commission's record and distributed to all Commission members.

This meeting will observe the COVID-19 protocols in place at our host location. All attendees must wear a mask when entering West Hall.

Parking is available in Lot #1 directly across the street from West Hall. A printable campus map with directions from all points is found here (see WE for West Hall on the corner of College Drive East and Park Side Drive): <https://www.middlesexcc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Middlesex-College-Campus-Map-wDirections.pdf>.

Issued 11/5/21

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For changes in schedule due to snow or other emergencies, see website <http://www.njleg.state.nj.us> or call 800-792-8630 (toll-free in NJ) or 609-847-3905.

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JUSTICE JOHN E. WALLACE, Jr. (Chair): The meeting will please come to order.

Welcome to the third public meeting of the Redistricting Commission. It's an in-person for the first time, and we're happy that we're able to do that.

I want to thank Middlesex County College for hosting this event this morning, and we hope that each of you who wish the opportunity are able to express the views that you want to give us. This is your opportunity to give us your views, and we certainly welcome you to do that.

Before we get started, I would ask the Secretary to please call the roll.

MS. MARTINEZ KRUGER (Commission Secretary):
Commissioner Redd.

MS. REDD: Present.

MS. MARTINEZ KRUGER: Commissioner Pagliughi.

MS. PAGLIUGHI: Present.

MS. MARTINEZ KRUGER: Commissioner Nash.

MR. NASH: Here.

MS. MARTINEZ KRUGER: Commissioner LoGrippe.

MR. LoGRIPPO: Here.

MS. MARTINEZ KRUGER: Commissioner Lagos.

Ms. LAGOS: Here.

MS. MARTINEZ KRUGER: Commissioner Gopal.

SENATOR GOPAL: Here.

MS. MARTINEZ KRUGER: Commissioner Duffy.

MR. DUFFY: Here.

MS. MARTINEZ KRUGER: Commissioner Delgado.

MS. DELGADO: Present.

MS. MARTINEZ KRUGER: Commissioner Ashmore.

MS. ASHMORE: Here.

MS. MARTINEZ KRUGER: Delegation Chair Steinhardt.

MR. STEINHARDT (Republican Delegation Chair): Here.

MS. MARTINEZ KRUGER: Delegation Chair Fuller.

MS. FULLER (Democratic Delegation Chair): Here.

MS. MARTINEZ KRUGER: Chair Wallace.

JUSTICE WALLACE: Here.

Thank you, Madam Secretary.

Before we begin, I would open the floor to the members of the Commission, and ask if anyone wishes to make a comment.

MS. FULLER: Good morning.

Thank you, Justice Wallace.

I just want to thank everyone for being here today. We're very excited to hear the testimony, and the continuation of the public process for the redistricting of the new congressional maps.

Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBERS OF AUDIENCE: We can't hear her.

MS. FULLER: Now I know; thank you. I'll speak up. Thank you.

MR. STEINHARDT: Good morning.

On behalf of-- I'm sorry.

MS. FULLER: No, no, go ahead, Doug.

MR. STEINHARDT: Please.

MS. FULLER: No, go ahead, Doug.

MR. STEINHARDT: On behalf of my Republican colleagues and I, I just want to welcome everybody to Middlesex County College. We look forward to an open and informative process, and I wish everyone a wonderful weekend.

Thank you.

JUSTICE WALLACE: Thank you, to both Chairs.

And now we'll get started with our hearing this morning.

The first witness will be Mildred Scott, Sheriff.

Sheriff Scott.

SHERIFF MILDRED S. SCOTT: Chairman Wallace, Vice Chairs Fuller and Steinhardt, and members of the Commission, thank you.

My name is Mildred Scott, and I am the Sheriff of Middlesex County. I want to welcome you to Middlesex County and Middlesex College today.

The process you are undertaking is one of the most important processes in our democratic form of government. Ensuring that districts are drawn to be representative of our communities in a place as diverse as New Jersey strikes at the very heart of who we are as a people.

Done correctly, this process can empower communities to make their voices heard in Washington, protect the rights of minorities to select candidates of their choosing, and ensure trust in our democratic institutions of government.

But if those ideals are not centered as you do your work, we can end up with districts that split communities of interest, disenfranchise

communities and voters of color, and result in a minority of voters having control over democratic institutions.

On top of that, you must respect principles enshrined in the United States Constitution, the Voting Rights Act, and 60 years of Federal courts jurisprudence enforcing the principle of one person, one vote.

And then there is the New Jersey State Constitution that must be adhered to. But your work does not stop there. Because as wonderful as all those documents are, if we take an honest look at the New Jersey Constitution we must admit that although New Jersey was one of the first states to adopt a commission process with an independent voice for creating new districts after each decennial census -- and thereby removing the creation of new districts from a partisan or a bipartisan legislation function -- our State Constitution is vague in terms of outlining principles about how you should evaluate proposals for new districts, and how to determine whether the districts you are creating are fair and equitable.

You will no doubt hear a lot about communities of interest, statewide partisan fairness, compactness, competitiveness, and preserving cores of prior districts. All are principles that I encourage you to consider during your deliberations because they advance the interests of the people, and yet, none of those words even appear in the State Constitution.

Balancing all of these principles to enact your map that truly represents New Jersey's diverse population and communities is incredibly difficult, and so on behalf of the residents of Middlesex County, I want to thank you for the incredibly difficult work you are undertaking.

Thank you.

I will get back to the principles I mentioned in a second, but another one that is important is the principle of transparency. The people of New Jersey need to know that this process -- which may be the single most important process that happens every 10 years in our political system -- the people need to know that this process is undertaken in the open and with good faith by all involved.

And to that end, I want to thank you for the steps you have taken to increase transparency and public trust. The Constitution only mandates three public hearings, but you have decided and agreed to 10. You have agreed to do many of them via online conference, ensuring that citizens need not even leave the comfort of their homes to have input into the process. And as we are witnessing today, you're committed to many hearings happening during nighttime or weekend hours, ensuring that these in-person meetings are open to a wider audience of people.

If there's one concept that I would like to lift up today in your deliberations, it is that the districts you create must be reflective of the broad diversity of our state. The census recently completed shows that our state will soon be majority non-white. In fact, it is already nearly even split between white residents and non-white. Our Hispanic and Latino population has grown substantially since the last census, climbing by more than 29 percent to comprise more than 2 million of our State's residents. And the Asian population increased 44 percent over the last decade, with more than 1 million people residing here of Asian American and Pacific Islander heritage. Here in Middlesex County, we are proud to say that with more than 237,000 Asian residents, we have the largest Asian population of any county in New Jersey.

In Middlesex County, we wear diversity on our sleeves with pride, and we believe the diversity of our communities coming together creates strength. We are home to the first known Black voter in New Jersey; and we have worked to create a more inclusive government where each of our diverse communities has a chance to lead and be represented in government. We are proud to be represented by the first Black woman in the U.S. House of Representatives. At the County level, all countywide constitutional officers are women; and for the first time, a majority of countywide officers in Middlesex County will be people of color.

In the State Legislature, we have elected the first Latina to represent Middlesex County in the State Legislature in Trenton. We have also elected the first Asian American from Middlesex County to his first full term in Trenton. And the residents of South Brunswick will proudly be represented by the first Asian American woman and the first Muslim woman in the State Legislature when she takes session beginning in January.

All of this has been possible not just because we have made deliberate choices to ensure our representation looks like the population we serve, but because districts have been created to broadly reflect the vast and proud diversity of our communities. And so yes, we urge you to ensure that the 10th District retains an African American majority, and we urge you to ensure that the 8th District remains a Hispanic majority.

But when considering other districts, we encourage you to take the approach that has led to increased representation for people of color in Middlesex County: and that is to create districts that reflect the broad diversity of our communities. It has not been necessary to pack people of color into a small number of districts to ensure they are represented.

However, it has been important that we have a large number of districts that broadly represent the diversity of our entire state.

In closing, this is the thought I will leave with you: Our diversity in New Jersey has long been one of our most significant strengths. In a state that is becoming more diverse and increasingly becoming a home to a broad number of immigrants from around the world, I encourage you to create districts that are reflective of the broad diversity. And as we've seen in Middlesex County, you do not need to pack people of color into as few districts as possible in order for them to be able to select candidates of their choosing. What is more important, and what creates more opportunities for our diverse populations to be represented, are districts that broadly represent the diversity of our State and our communities.

I want to thank you for your time this morning. And again, thank you for the efforts in the extremely important process you are undertaking. I look forward to engaging this Commission and all of the communities we represent in Middlesex County as we move forward.

Thank you.

JUSTICE WALLACE: And thank you very much for your comments.

Our next speaker is John Hsu, followed by Marci Bandelli.

J O H N H S U: Good morning.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

I'd just like to-- I'm from Edison, New Jersey; I'm part of Congressional District 6. I just want to talk about the District a little bit.

I was the campaign manager for a Council race in Old Bridge. Old Bridge just split into two congressional districts, District 6 and 12, so it's

actually very confusing for a lot of residents there. I would say 90 percent of the residents who I talk to were not aware of which district that they lived in. This will, I think -- having more clarity-- Having the whole town in one congressional district will have more clarity for the residents there.

Another thing I think would be helpful would be to look at Monmouth County in Congressional District 6. If you look at the map, it's a little bit -- it looks a little bit strange, like with Asbury Park, Deal, and Long Branch. It does not look like it's very contiguous. If you look at that, it's almost connected by one street to the rest of the 6th District; so that does look a little confusing.

My last point is, I'd like to see a more competitive 4th District. We know that it's very difficult for a Democrat to win in the 4th District, and also for a Republican to win in the 12th District. I think it just helps democracy to have more competitive districts that focus more on the issues at hand. This helps the voters, hopefully, get a better sense of what their politicians stand for.

That's all; thanks.

JUSTICE WALLACE: Thank you very much for your comments.

Our next speaker is Marci Bandelli, followed by Janice Siegel.

MARCI BANDELLI: Good morning.

JUSTICE WALLACE: Good morning.

MS. BANDELLI: First and foremost, I would like to thank the Redistricting Commission for holding several hearings on this very consequential process.

Does anybody mind if I take my mask off? Is that okay, or--

JUSTICE WALLACE: Well, my only-- It's the organization, Middlesex County, that requires it, on the sign, so--

MS. BANDELLI: Okay.

JUSTICE WALLACE: --I would prefer--

MS. BANDELLI: No, no, it's just easier.

JUSTICE WALLACE: I understand completely. (laughter) We understand exactly what you're saying, but--

MS. BANDELLI: Okay, thank you.

JUSTICE WALLACE: All right.

MS. BANDELLI: Drawing district lines fairly is an awesome responsibility that requires fairness and transparency in order to preserve our democracy.

My name is Marci Bandelli, and I am a 20-year resident of Westfield, New Jersey. I am a wife, mother, clinical social worker, business owner, and the President of Westfield 20/20, an all-volunteer grassroots social advocacy group whose mission is to hold our elected officials accountable and empower citizens through education and awareness.

Gerrymandering is antithetical to this very idea of accountability and empowerment. I will not pretend to be an expert in redistricting because I am not. I am, however, an expert in human behavior, victimization, trauma, and marginalized populations.

And with that, I would like to share my experience of my own voter disenfranchisement and disempowerment.

In February of 2013, four concerned citizens, including myself, scheduled a meeting with our former Congressman in CD7. We scheduled this meeting because eight weeks earlier an armed gunman walked inside the

Sandy Hook Elementary School and massacred 26 people in two minutes with a Bushmaster assault rifle. Twenty of those souls were 1st graders.

As a nation, we were traumatized; as a small group of fearful citizens, we needed answers. There were reports that a Federal background check bill on all gun purchases would be voted on by the House of Representatives imminently.

During the meeting with our former Congressman and his Chief of Staff, we asked all the right questions respectfully. We were overprepared and, at times, emotional. We were there for 45 minutes. We left that meeting crushed, disempowered, and disenfranchised. Why? Because our former Congressman did not answer any of our questions. He was evasive, smug, and doodling on a yellow legal pad for 45 minutes.

Why wouldn't our representative answer any questions regarding policy and his upcoming vote on background checks? Surely he cared about the victims of the tragedy and had an opinion about assault weapons getting into the wrong hands, right? So why wouldn't he answer even the most basic question?

It's simple; he didn't have to. You see, the Congressional District 7 map, in 2010, was drawn to favor the incumbent, my former Congressman. It didn't matter what we thought, or asked, or pleaded. He knew, year after year, he would continue to get elected based on his map. There was no accountability to his constituents. Our voice and our vote just didn't matter. It was a lock. He had the map, and that's all that mattered.

In 2018, CD7 flipped; it flipped under the most sinister of circumstances: a newly elected President determined to eliminate the Affordable Care Act without a replacement, leaving thousands without

healthcare coverage throughout the District. This was life or death for many residents in District 7. There was such a sense of desperation that even a seasoned therapist like me was shook. In the blazing heat, rain, snow, and sleet, constituents stood outside our former Congressman's office advocating for themselves. Just men and women, some in wheelchairs, in the frigid cold.

As constituents we out-organized, we outworked, we outpaced, we out-volunteered, with the added benefit of having an exceptional candidate. It was superhuman, Herculean. This was not fair. It was not normal. We had no choice. The lines favored our former Congressman handily. That's how gerrymandering affects the electorate.

Since 2018, CD7 has become a more competitive District, and the results of the last election prove it. But is it fair? Is it equitable? Right now, our District is predominantly a white, suburban, wealthy District, with 66 percent of its residents being white, 14 percent Hispanic, 12 Asian, and 5 percent Black. I would like to remind the Commission that Hispanics were the largest ethnic group added to New Jersey's population growth.

As you can see, CD7 is hardly an equitable map, and it does not meet the standard recommended by the League of Women Voters to effectively represent racial minorities. According to the census, CD7 is underpopulated by 24,000-plus residents. Our next-door neighbors in CD10 are overpopulated by 42,474 residents, which comprises of Union, Essex, and Morris counties. Rather than the Commission twisting itself into a pretzel, CD7 virtually can simply add the rest of Union County, which it presently shares with NJ10.

Let's make Union whole again by including it in CD7. There are, indeed, many ways to draw a fair and inclusive map without favoring a

political party or candidate. Healthy competitions are good for our democracy and assist us in holding our elected officials accountable to their constituents, not their political party. Partisan gerrymandering has grave consequences. It contradicts the core principle of a representative government; and instead of voters choosing their elected officials, gerrymandering ensures that elected officials choose their voters.

So again, I thank you all for holding these hearings and honoring your commitment to draw fair maps for the residents of this great state. As you can see, the public is engaged and watching.

Thank you very much.

JUSTICE WALLACE: And thank you.

Our next speaker is Janice Siegel, followed by Andrea Stein.

Ms. Siegel.

JANICE SIEGEL, Esq.: Good morning, Commissioners, Justice Wallace.

Thank you for the opportunity to present my remarks to you today.

I'm Janice Siegel, a 26-year resident of Westfield, New Jersey. I'm a retired lawyer, a political activist, and former Chairwoman of the Westfield Democratic Committee, from 2013 to 2019.

My remarks today are my own. I am not representing any people or organizations. They are drawn from my own experiences and observations.

Today I will address some of the considerations of your charge to define New Jersey congressional districts for the next 10 years so that they are fair and competitive.

My focus is on the 7th Congressional District, just like Marci Bandelli's was. That's because I am one of the people who spearheaded competitiveness in that District, and I want your work to recognize the long and hard work that went into creating this competition -- what my fellow residents of Westfield, of Union County, and the current 7th Congressional District accomplished with that long, hard work. We created a community out of a District that was previously designated to be a safe Republican District, with no obvious rationale other than that. Because we created that community, a competitive district emerged. We are the example of what *you* are charged with accomplishing elsewhere. That's why there is no sense in significantly changing the boundaries of the 7th Congressional District. And, most importantly, there's no good reason to draw the map to sacrifice any area of the 7th.

Maintaining the cohesion of an existing district is part of your mission. You also must establish districts with equal populations. As a result of the 2020 census, several thousand residents must be added to the 7th. That could be accomplished in a number of ways. Of course, Ms. Bandelli just explained how adding Union County, making it whole, is one way. I'm going to focus on an obvious way of doing it, which includes adding Scotch Plains and Fanwood in the 7th.

Westfield, Scotch Plains, and Fanwood residents are already a community, but Scotch Plains is divided. Many Westfield residents who are empty nesters moved to Scotch Plains or Fanwood, and then the adult children of Westfield residents have made Scotch Plains or Fanwood their home. These two groups, most seamlessly, move among the three towns. I've

seen this happen among my friends -- who are the empty nesters -- and my son's friends, who have moved to Scotch Plains and Fanwood.

I might add that Garwood, Cranford, and Springfield, which are already part of the 7th, are part of the Union County community.

Residents are highly interconnected. They attend religious services and events in each other's towns. For instance, one of my attractions to moving to Westfield 26 years ago, was that there is a highly regarded congregation in Westfield whose members are drawn from each of the towns I've mentioned. Similarly, residents of Westfield are members of congregations in Scotch Plains, Springfield, and Summit. Residents of Westfield, Fanwood, and Scotch Plains use athletic and communal facilities in each of the towns.

Many residents of these communities commute on the New Jersey Transit Raritan Valley Line. They share mutual grievances regarding the service they have had, and they have banded together to advocate for change -- another aspect of this cohesive nature.

They also share the frequent use of Route 22, with the many woes associated with it. Unfortunately, these towns also share a need to handle the ever-growing problems with flooding.

There are other obvious choices to expand boundaries in the 7th, such as expanding the footprint in Somerset County, or making Union County, as Ms. Bandelli pointed out, politically whole.

The parts of each of these political units that are in the 7th can make sense. Residents from Union and from Somerset County came together to create the competitiveness of the 7th.

I want to turn attention now to the democratic -- lowercase *D* -- values of redistricting. Competitiveness makes people feel their participation matters. The flip side, a lack of competitiveness, is a form of voter suppression. I got involved in political action because I was previously thwarted by the oft-heard message in my previous home in Pennsylvania and in Westfield, to wit, “We’re the only game in in town.”

One of my early activities in Westfield was to sit at a table at a prominent intersection with election materials and a sign, *Westfield Democrats*. People would be stopped at a light and give me a thumbs up; others would pass by the table to say they didn’t think there were any Democrats in Westfield. I imagine there are Democrats in safe Democratic -- so-called *safe districts* that are Democratic, where the same sentiment is expressed by Republican-leaning residents.

This should not be how it is. When there’s competition, the candidate nomination process is more robust. Lots of people take an interest and get out to see and hear the candidates.

When I was involved in the 2018 nomination process for congressional candidates, there were eight people who sought the nomination. This is just within the Democratic Party. We held a candidates’ forum that was standing room only, with attendance drawn from many towns in the Union County portion of the 7th. And I might add that people from other counties came to our forum as well. It was this forum that turned the tide in Union County for the eventual nominee.

The last area I want to address is the benefit of continuity of political units, absent good reasons to change, such as the need to addressing already under-representation. An entire town should be in one district or in

one county. People need to know who their representative is and how to reach the representative's office. To politically active people, it's hard to believe people don't know. But, they don't. Often they ask a friend in their town. If that friend is in a different district, though living in the same town, this information can easily be transmitted and mistakenly acted upon.

I was part of the effort during the pandemic to make sure people knew where to turn. Continuity of boundaries and political cohesiveness between a town and congressional district promote ease in understanding government, in ascertaining who represents residents. These are practical, important values that I also urge you to consider.

Keep the 7th as much as possible, and add areas judiciously for the sake of our democracy.

Once again, thank you for giving me the opportunity to address you today.

Thank you.

JUSTICE WALLACE: Thank you for your comments.

Our next speaker is Andrea Stein, followed by Lacey Rzeszowski.

A N D R E A S T E I N: Chair Wallace, Delegation Chairs Fuller and Steinhardt, and members of the Commission, thank you again for holding these hearings and offering an opportunity to the public to have their voices heard in a process that will have a profound influence on our lives.

I want to echo those who have already spoken about the awesome responsibility this Commission has. How our districts are drawn will have a direct impact on how well the diversity and richness of our state's population is represented in Congress. I urge you to prioritize fairness,

inclusivity, and representative democracy in the critical work that you are about to do.

As you know, my name is Andrea Stein. I have been a resident of Summit, New Jersey, in New Jersey's 7th Congressional District, since 2003; but have lived in Springfield for most of my life after 1976. I have been in this District for the better part of 45 years.

This will be the fifth redistricting that has taken place in that time.

I am here to urge the Commissioners to maintain the District largely within its current boundaries for several reasons. First, it is challenging for residents and Congresspeople to find themselves shifted in and out of districts. Members of Congress are the Federal representatives that residents can feel closest to. They are the people they can turn to when they need assistance. As such, there is benefit to residents being able to maintain those relationships.

Second, there are good reasons for keeping these particular communities together. For example, towns along the commuter rail lines -- the Morris and Essex Line, the Millburn-Summit and Providence, Berkeley Heights, Bernards Township, etc., and the Raritan Valley Line through Cranford, Barwood, Westfield, Bridgewater, Somerville -- share many of the same concerns and issues. Certainly, they are all affected by the Gateway Tunnel, which has been something our current congressional representative has fought hard for. These are also similar communities in terms of socioeconomics, diversity, school systems. It makes sense for residents of these communities to share a representative.

Moreover, as demonstrated by the effects of Hurricane Ida, these communities all face similar issues as a result of their sharing the Passaic and Raritan rivers. Having a single representative who can advocate for their needs is critical.

Third, there has been talk about making the 7th District more competitive, or making it a safe Republican seat, as it was originally drawn. I should say *originally* as of 10 years ago. It is clear from the results of the 2020 election that it is, in fact, a competitive District. And as to making it a *safe seat*, demographics and politics have shifted in New Jersey since the last census. It is clear that residents across the state, and particularly in the 7th District, have made a choice to elect more Democrats. It is unfair to impose political change on voters who have clearly indicated what they want.

Finally, I know that redistricting is a process that should be independent of any particular elected official or candidate. That said, our current Congressman is only in his second term and has already invested innumerable hours in getting to know this District and its needs. It would be a disservice to our residents to have to start all over again with a new Congressperson; not because of electoral outcomes, but because of redistricting.

Thank you, again, for your time and consideration.

JUSTICE WALLACE: And thank you very much for your comments.

Our next speaker is Lacey Rzeszowski, followed by Christian Estevez.

LACEY COTTER RZESZOWSKI: Good morning.

JUSTICE WALLACE: Good morning.

MS. RZESZOWSKI: First off, I'd like to thank all the Commissioners for your commitment to the New Jersey Constitution, for going above and beyond the required three public hearings; and for your commitment, specifically, to honoring the ideal of creating and/or maintaining fair and competitive districts.

I'm Lacey Cotter Rzeszowski, and I live in CD7. I'm a founding member of Summit Marches On, which is a grassroots organization committed to voter engagement, located in Summit, New Jersey.

The 2016 presidential election results indicated that the legislative district in which I lived could be flipped. So as a long shot, I ran for office for the 16 towns of LD 21. As you all know, it was an important year for New Jersey and Virginia to gauge voters' temperature, just as this year was, again, another bellwether year.

I know firsthand the amount of work we did for turnout. I know firsthand the amount of work we did on messaging; and in the end, massive coattails afforded us one of the closest margins in the LD 21 race ever for a Democrat. But *closest margin* means I lost. The Minority Leader won that year, and, again, two years later, despite massive investment, and again earlier this month. Why? Because of registrations? No. Bramnick successfully got people to the polls. Call it messaging, or mobilization, or incumbent advantage.

Elections aren't determined by registration numbers. Look, we all know that turnout is woefully low. So when we see these Democratic wins in historic Republican municipalities -- such as Westfield or Summit -- and in congressional districts such as 7 or 11, we know these elections are

determined not by their registered voters or swinging Independents. Frankly, they are determined by the voters who actually voted.

In 2018, Summit Marches On sent out thousands of handwritten, personalized postcards directly to voters to mobilize them to vote. All across the District and around the state similar grassroots efforts were underway to raise engagement. We canvassed all of 2017 and 2018. I personally hosted the GOTv for the midterm elections, and 4,000 volunteers came through my home in a massive effort to personally connect with voters. Respectfully, that is a large component of how the district was flipped. Unbelievable engagement on the side of voters; engagement to get out to vote, not registrations.

Bottom line, folks should not be penalized for the work we did to motivate our neighbors, and ultimately flip the District.

And let me say this. Since most of the grassroots organizing in New Jersey was spearheaded by women following the Women's March, our voices should not be silenced.

So as you deliberate from whence these 24,000 folks, to make CD7 once again the appropriate population size, should come, I implore this Commission to make every effort to maintain the fair and competitive nature of this District.

Having the smallest margin of victory in 2020 in the entire United States, CD7 is the definition of *fair and competitive*.

Thank you for your time.

JUSTICE WALLACE: Thank you.

Christian Estevez, followed by Mark Fresolone.

Good morning.

CHRISTIAN ESTEVEZ: Good morning.

Good morning, Commissioners, Justice Wallace, Chairpersons Steinhardt and Fuller.

My name is Christian Estevez, and I'm the President of the Latino Action Network.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to address you this morning, and thank you for taking the time to listen to the residents of our state as you consider the lines for the next congressional map that will have such a big impact on the representation New Jersey will have in our nation's capital.

It is with that in mind that I address you today. The lines you draw as a Commission will help determine whether the members we elect to the United States House of Representatives are truly reflective of the great diversity of our state.

Following the 2020 census count, Latinos now comprise 20.9 percent of New Jersey's total population. However, Latinos remain underrepresented in New Jersey's Congressional Delegation, comprising only 8 percent of congressional representatives from our state.

New Jersey also continues to lag behind in Latino representation in the State Legislature and top political appointments. Latinos are woefully underrepresented in the State Legislature, making up only 7 percent of the State Senate, and only 8 percent of the General Assembly.

The lack of representation has huge consequences for underserved communities. As a growing segment of the State's population, Latinos continue to have little voice in decisions made in Trenton and in Washington, D.C. Latinos are left out of many important conversations and

have little power to influence decisions that are made due to lack of representation.

As a result, Latinos tend to suffer from a disproportionate amount of negative impacts in the areas of housing, health, education, and employment. Latinos continue to lack access to affordable housing, our children remain trapped in segregated school districts, and we continue to lack access to basic civil rights, such as language and translation in courts and in healthcare.

The current pandemic has laid bare the inequities our community has faced for decades. For example, while Latinos make up 20.9 percent of the State's population, Latino men represented 43 percent of the coronavirus deaths in people under 50. Latino children were also over-represented among students who lacked computers and Internet access when schools shut down due to the pandemic.

However, there is now an opportunity for New Jersey to put forward fair and accurate redistricting efforts that reflect the power of the Latino vote. This is especially important for a new generation of Latino voters, with Latino youth comprising 21.8 percent of New Jersey's school-aged children.

The redistricting process provides an opportunity to create a fairer New Jersey, one in which Latinos have appropriate representation at the State and Federal levels. We aim to advocate for appropriate congressional and State legislative districts, where Latinos have more opportunities to elect candidates of their choice. These districts must respect our communities of interest and ensure that our communities are neither packed nor cracked so that our influence is not diluted.

We cannot afford to have too many Latinos packed into a few districts so that our community lacks influence in all others. Conversely, we cannot afford to have our community cracked, or underrepresented, in all districts so that we don't have influence in any district.

You, as Commissioners, have the opportunity to consider the size and distribution of New Jersey's Latino population, and can right size the number of Latinos in each district so as to maximize our communities' opportunities to elect candidates of our choice.

There are opportunities to create greater Latino representation, both in the northern and southern portions of the state. In the last 10 years, our communities have continued to grow across the state, and that needs to be represented in the future map.

The Latino Action Network is working with a coalition of organizations that represent New Jersey's communities of color to draw a map that presents the best opportunities for representation for our communities, while also meeting the other requirements that this Commission must consider. We will be sharing these maps with you in the coming weeks. We look forward to exchanging ideas with all members of the Commission on how we can draw a map that truly represents the diversity of our State.

Thank you.

JUSTICE WALLACE: Thank you.

Mark Fresolone, followed by Vicki Fresolone.

MARK FRESOLONE: Thank you for having these hearings. It means a lot to us.

I'm a 23-year resident of Clinton Township in CD7 and an active member of my church. I run an open mic, and have been a scout leader in the past.

Congressional District 7 is, today, kind of a beacon of hope. The District went from having 19 continuous wins by a single party to being competitive. Further, for the past two congressional elections, a candidate who has refused corporate campaign donations actually won.

The District is in play. It's in part due to demographic changes, but also because of individual contributors and volunteers who have made the difference.

Things are changing, citizens are watching and participating. It's kind of a model of quality democracy in America when individual action is making such a difference.

The constituents of CD7 have coalesced around their needs, fighting for their candidate with activism and individual contributions. And don't we all want to see if they continue to do so? Why would we radically change the competitive makeup of this model District?

Thank you.

JUSTICE WALLACE: And thank you.

Vicki Fresolone.

VICKI FRESOLONE: First, I want to thank you for this opportunity to talk to the Redistricting Commission. And I want to thank you for all the hard work you're doing, and for making -- allowing the public to be heard. I think that's really important.

My name is Vicki Fresolone, and I live in Congressional District 7. I live in Hunterdon County, where I was born and raised, so it's a really important District to me.

I'm here today because I want to urge the Commission to seriously consider and limit the changes that they would make to CD7.

As many people have discussed already, it was through hard work of many engaged citizens that CD7 became a competitive District. And that's not a complaint. We should all be working hard for our democracy, right? That's actually kind of a brag, because our District is now, as it stands, what I think democracy is all about. It's, as my husband said, a beacon of personal engagement, civic engagement.

Because our District has become so competitive, candidates in CD7 must engage with the people who they want to represent. In the recent elections, candidates won or lost votes on the strength of their commitment to their constituents. The candidates' views on the issues, their experience, and their commitment to the people they hope to represent made all the difference on who would win or who would lose that election.

I believe that process engages more voters, more citizens, and creates true accountability of our government to the people who they are there to serve.

I became active in CD7 because I wanted to make an impact. And a lot of neighbors and friends engaged in the same way. I can tell you that it is really thrilling to meet the candidates and have them actually listen to what you have to say. It's empowering to know that you can really make a difference in your government and you can have a voice. And I'm here to ask you not to take that away from me. Not to take that away from me, my

friends, my neighbors. Don't disenfranchise me and the other citizens of CD7 to make CD7 a slam dunk for any party or any one candidate.

Thank you.

MS. FULLER: Thank you.

JUSTICE WALLACE: Thank you.

Philip George is our next speaker, followed by Sonya Redd.

Philip George.

PHILIP GEORGE: Good morning, Justice Wallace, members of the Commission.

I thank you for this somewhat thankless, but very important job, especially noting split 6 and 6 from each party.

My name is Phil George; I'm Council President in Highland Park in three terms. And we're not here to talk about any of politics. And anyone who believes that there is a safe district or not has not been watching the returns nationwide over the last four years, including our State.

As my father taught me -- who was Mayor for three terms in another town -- there are no safe elections. What you're here to do, and what we in Highland Park want you to do, is to make it fair. And I think that the split between the Commission, 6 and 6, shows New Jersey's commitment to that fairness in drawing our congressional districts, because there's compromise involved. There are choices to be made. And that's what we expect will come out to be fair and to maintain the continuity of our electorates. That we look -- when we look to the census, as well as the demographics of our state in drawing these lines, are there connections in communities? We talk about diversity -- and Highland Park is a very diverse town, so we're alert to that, like the rest of the state -- but is there a nexus

that connects those different diversities together? Is it a college? Is it an industry? Is it a geographical center? These are just as important as trying to ensure safety of elections.

They aren't safe, because when a voter walks into the voting booth they make choices that are important to them. The candidates are chosen to represent particular sides, but then voters decide. So regardless of how the districts are drawn, it's always and ultimately the voter. And as several speakers have said, mobilization of the voters is more important. And we ask you to maintain the continuity and the fairness of those selections so that the voters themselves recognize in their choice of candidates, and then in the election of those candidates -- to represent them in what they believe is to their best interest. And ultimately, that's what our system of government is designed for. Ultimately, New Jersey has one of the fairest systems, of anywhere, in legislation, in broadening the ability of the voter to vote and not cut that ability off.

And we in Highland Park, and in this District, ask you to exercise your processes and ensure the fairness and continuity of our legislative districts, so that we can maintain the integrity of the ability of the voter to go in and choose what she believes is best.

Thank you.

MS. FULLER: Thank you.

JUSTICE WALLACE: Thank you very much for your comments.

Sonya Redd, followed by Ashok Rakhit -- and forgive me if I mispronounce that.

Sonya Redd.

S O N Y A R E D D: Good morning, Commissioners; and thank you for the opportunity to share my view and have an opportunity to present before you.

My name, again, is Sonya Redd. I live in the Congressional 12th District. And a live and worship in what is called the greater New Brunswick area. I live off of Route 27 in Franklin Township, where I have resided for the past 25 years; but I've lived off of that corridor for the past 42 years, living in both South Brunswick and North Brunswick as well.

My community is quite diverse -- a real blend of Black, brown, and white peoples. A perfect blend of what our nation should look like. My place of worship is one of the largest Baptist churches in the area. Most of the members are from Somerset, Middlesex, and Mercer counties. Most of the old, old families of the church are uniquely connected to the other Black churches in the greater New Brunswick area.

Our community is bordered by Route 287, Route 22, Route 1; and Route 27 runs through the middle along with the Raritan River. It encompasses Rutgers University, Princeton, Rider, Middlesex County, Raritan County (*sic*) colleges; and the best hospitals that we can imagine -- Robert Wood Johnson in New Brunswick and in Somerville; St. Peters and Princeton Medical.

My community includes Franklin High School from where two of my grandchildren have graduated, and one is currently attending; South Brunswick High School, where my son graduated; New Brunswick High School, where my daughter-in-law graduated; North Brunswick, where my nephew has graduated; and Rutgers University, where my son met his wife and they both are alums.

This is my community.

My community includes Hillsboro and Princeton, where my doctors reside. It includes Cranbury, where I spent the last 20 years of my corporate career. And also, we obviously enjoy wonderful theaters in New Brunswick.

My community includes portions of every county in the 12th Congressional District, and is in the 17th Legislative District. I am very pleased with both Congressional and Legislative Districts that make up my community.

We have made great strides with internal interracial relations, interfaith relations; police relationships have greatly improved in our community. We're grateful to our now not-so-new Somerset County Prosecutor.

Also, even though on paper it would appear that Franklin Township and New Brunswick are separate towns, the people on both sides come together to help each other.

When I leave here today, I'm going to a prayer vigil in New Brunswick, even though I live in Franklin Township. This is not new. Churches from both towns are connected, the people are connected. We have, in the past, prayed together for our communities, and will continue to do so.

Please do not make any changes to our District. We're very pleased, and we're working very well together.

Thank you for your time.

MS. FULLER: Thank you.

JUSTICE WALLACE: And thank you.

Ashok Rakhit, followed by Kathleen Murray.

A S H O K R A K H I T: Good morning, respected Commissioners.

Thank you for this opportunity for me to come and express my voice in this redistricting process.

I have lived in Warren Township for the last 22-plus years, in Somerset County. Our Township is in District 7. However, we have a temple and community center in Franklin Township, which is not in District 7.

Our minority, Hindu Indian migrant community, is spread over different townships of Somerset County. I am a Trustee and a past President of our temple and community center, and I'm here to request you to consider to make Somerset County represented by one representative that would include the place of our worship also -- i.e., Franklin Township.

In true democracy, as we all heard, it is important that minority voices are not diluted and are heard. And District 7, being already competitive, it is imperative that we maintain that way. And if we keep our minority community over Somerset County all in District 7, we believe our interests and challenges will be heard by our representatives, and to Washington and also for local issues.

And that is why I am here -- to help to put Franklin Township in District 7. I think this will benefit us, and we'll continue to be a productive community helping the country and adding to all the values of our democracy here.

That's all I have to say, and thank you for listening.

JUSTICE WALLACE: Thank you.

Kathleen Murray is our next speaker, followed by Elizabeth Graner.

Ms. Murray.

KATHLEEN MURRAY: Thank you, Judge Wallace; thank you, Commissioners, for this opportunity today.

I'm Kathleen Murray; I live in Cranford, New Jersey. I'm a small business owner, a Medicare recipient, I'm on the Environmental Commission, our Planning Board, and am a voter in CD7.

My training is as a biologist, and biologists like criteria. So my comments are going to be related to criteria, and I encourage you to use understandable criteria in making your decisions.

The first is that the District be fair and competitive. As has been mentioned by a number of speakers, CD7 is the poster child for a competitive district; and in the last, most recent election, was the most competitive congressional district in the country. As such, that's an argument for leaving the District untouched. But due to population changes, some adjustments do need to be made, and I'll address those in the following comments,

Preserving existing political communities I think is a very important consideration. In CD7, we have two communities, Scotch Plains and Union, that are divided between Districts. I don't think this provides for effective government. Not only are the citizens in those townships divided in which congressional representative to contact, but the legislators in those communities -- the commissioners, the mayors -- are divided. And the congressional representatives are divided into who to listen to with respect to the needs of those communities. I think it's very important that the municipal boundaries be considered and included as a whole. Others have spoken to other interests such as communities like Westfield, Fanwood,

Scotch Plains remaining together. I will leave that to your decision, but I think that keeping individual municipalities whole is critical.

Political communities are not only divided by municipal and county boundaries, however. When I first got involved in CD7, I thought it was a rather odd-looking District, snaking across the middle of the state. But there is much that binds us; and one of the main areas that binds us is the Raritan Valley Line. Commuting along that line has many challenges, and our battle for a one-seat ride extends all the way out to Hunterdon County. This unites us, and it is an important consideration. Our current Congressman has been a champion for the Gateway Tunnel, which will facilitate transportation. This affects so many people who live along the Line, not only the people who ride the Raritan Valley Line, their families. "What's going to be for dinner -- is it fast food again, because the train's late? Or am I home on time to cook a meal? Am I picking my child up, or am I paying for extra day care?" The Raritan Valley Line impacts so many lives in CD7, and it makes sense to keep that intact.

I mentioned that I live in Cranford. Flooding is a major issue in Cranford, and has been for decades. But water does not respect municipal and county lines. Water goes where water goes. And CD7 shares similar concerns with flooding in many of the towns in Somerset County, as well as Union County. Having a single congressional representative who is going to represent that particular interest is very important to us.

I do recognize that this is a tough job that you have before us. There is a-- I think faith in government may be at an all-time low. There's a commonly held belief that you all will go behind closed doors and meet with party bosses and carve up the state. I think it's so important at this critical

time in our history that the decisions you make are defensible and make sense to the electorate. We want an engaged electorate, and not one that thinks it's a done deal. This is so important -- that the story you tell and the criteria that you use to explain your decisions be understandable and defensible to the citizens so we have confidence in our government moving forward.

Thank you.

JUSTICE WALLACE: Thank you.

Ms. Graner, followed by William Griffeth.

E L I Z A B E T H G R A N E R: Good morning.

JUSTICE WALLACE: Good morning.

MS. GRANER: Thank you, Justice Wallace, Chairwoman Fuller, Chairman Steinhardt, and all members of the Commission for your commitment to transparency and accountability by including public input into your process.

My name is Elizabeth Graner, and I live in Basking Ridge. I am politically active, and a former State Legislature candidate; but I come before you as a mom and a New Jerseyan.

As a constituent, the issues that are the most important to me are the environment, transportation, and affordability.

I come here to ask that when the congressional map is redrawn, the 7th Congressional District remains fair and competitive.

Our Federal representation must reflect the values and needs of the people who live here -- or there, not here. And our Federal representation must reflect our needs. And redrawing a map so that CD7 is, again, shamelessly gerrymandered to favor one political party over another will

ensure that the values and needs of the people who live in Springfield and Somerville are simply no longer represented.

The values and interests of single mothers who struggle to make ends meet, and need a Congressperson who will fight to restore the SALT tax deduction; or ensure that Route 78 doesn't crumble and fall will no longer be represented.

CD7, like many others said, is politically competitive. We must keep it that way so that the voices of every constituent can be heard, not suppressed by the unnecessary changes that will magically connect our most rural communities to our most affluent. Please ensure that New Jersey's 7th Congressional District is drawn fairly.

Thank you for your commitment to the great Garden State.

MS. FULLER: Thank you.

JUSTICE WALLACE: Thank you.

Mr. Griffeth, followed by Brian Haas.

WILLIAM GRIFFETH: Good morning, Commissioners, Justice Wallace.

Looking around here, I'm impressed that we're able to sit here and talk about these important issues. I'd hate to live in a totalitarian country where even if there were something like this, it would be a rubber stamp.

So thanks for your participation, and let me begin.

I'm William Griffeth; I have lived in Westfield for 34 years. I'm a native of Georgia, which itself has seen political turmoil and change. I'm a member of the League of Women Voters of New Jersey, but I'm really representing my own views here, as informed by the recommendations of the League-sponsored Fair Districts project.

As you know, the League advocates not *bipartisan* commissions but *nonpartisan* commissions, so that you would expect the Greens and the Libertarians to be included as well,

But I wanted to mention that the League recommendations include a redistricting process that also ensures racial equity, preserves communities of interest, and doesn't intentionally favor any party candidate or incumbent.

In addition, I believe that the process should ensure competitiveness and permit continuity of representation.

As you know, in 2020, CD7 was one of the most competitive Districts in the nation. This is a good thing, and should be preserved, since it ensures that the voters face a meaningful choice on Election Day, not a foregone conclusion.

Moreover, the 7th District, as it stands today, encompasses a particularly large community of interest: much of the ridership of NJ Transit's Raritan Valley Line. Twelve of the 19 stations on that Line are in the 7th District. All riders of the Raritan Valley Line share an interest in having a one-seat ride into New York. Other things being equal, this ridership should not be split among multiple districts. Currently, the 10th District contains the stations in Newark and Roselle Park, and the 12th District has stations in Bound Brook, Dunnellon, Plainfield, and Fanwood. All of these towns, except Newark, could reasonably be added to the 7th District, with adjustments elsewhere.

I might point out that Districts 1 through 4 (*sic*) in the southern part of the state are underpopulated by about 57,000 people. So there's a lot of adjustment that's going to have to take place. Much of the excess

population is in the Northeast, in Districts 8, 9, and 10. And even District 4 itself has an overpopulation. So there's a lot of work to be done, and it's not an easy job. And that's why this focus on communities of interest is so important.

I was especially moved by the remarks of the man representing the Latino community. And I know there are a lot of Latino voters in 8 who need, perhaps -- instead of having their votes wasted voting for somebody who's going to easily be elected, they can move into other districts and have influence there.

So going forward, other changes in the 7th District are more people and unification of municipalities, as other people have mentioned. More people are needed in the 7th District, about 14,000 more, in order to be one-twelfth of the population in the state. I think the courts have ruled that you need about 0.75 percent difference in population among the various districts.

Several towns, such as Union Township and Scotch Plains, are partially in the 7th District and partially in other districts, as mentioned; I think Districts 10 and 12 are the ones involved. Bringing such towns wholly into the 7th would better preserve those communities of interest, and also bring the District's population more into balance with populations in other districts.

In closing, I want to return to the Fair Districts principal -- that redistricting decisions not be made to favor any officeholder, candidate, or party. Maintaining the 7th District as an intensely competitive District would ensure that the outcomes of future elections are not predetermined by this Commission, but rather are left to the voters of the District.

Thank you very much.

MS. FULLER: Thank you.

JUSTICE WALLACE: Thank you.

Brian Haas, followed by Devon Jiang.

B R I A N H A A S: Good morning, Commissioner Wallace. I want to thank this Commission for giving me an opportunity to speak at this public hearing.

I believe that transparency is fundamental to democracy and to good government; and I want to do my part in fulfilling that goal that Commissioner Steinhardt stated at the October 23 hearing -- to help achieve a map that is responsive to the will of the State's voters.

My name is Brian Haas, and I have been a resident of New Providence in Union County for 27 years. I moved to New Providence in 1994 soon after getting married. I have a daughter who recently graduated from college and another daughter in her second year of college. They both graduated from the public school in town.

I decided to testify to share my experience as a resident of New Jersey's Congressional District 7. I believe that there are many others who have a similar experience, and I think we've heard some of them today. My wife and I are both registered Democrats. We both care very much about good government, and having a representative who is responsive to citizens.

For many, many years, we knew what it was like to live in a safe Republican District. Starting in 1994, when we moved here -- *there*, I should say -- until 2018, we never felt we had someone who represented our views in Washington. Throughout this 24-year history, my wife and I felt like we were represented by people who were more interested in pleasing their

corporate donors than working on behalf of their constituents. Whether that was healthcare, reasonable gun safety, climate change, you name it. We felt like we did not have a voice.

After Donald Trump was elected, I felt I could no longer watch from the sidelines. My wife and I became politically active. We joined with others in our area in trying to elect the Democrats in a safe Republican District. We worked our hearts out, attended candidate debates, knocking on doors, donating to help elect someone who would listen to his constituents' needs, rather than falling in line with the party leadership.

The current congressional map was drawn 7 to 5 in favor of Republicans. It was only through a monumental grassroots movement that we were able to overcome the advantage of the incumbent to elect a Democrat to the seat in 2018. In 2020, this District was the most competitive congressional election in the country. To somehow assume that the current 10 to 2 advantage the Democrats hold in New Jersey means that these districts are now safe Democratic seats is ludicrous. The 10 to 2 advantage is because of the hard work of people who don't want to go back to the days where you're represented by someone who doesn't share our values and votes against our interests. The fact that Congressman Malinowski won by the narrowest of margins in 2020 is clear indication that this is an extremely competitive District.

Tom Malinowski was re-elected because he was responsive to his constituents' needs. He held numerous Town Halls throughout the District; helped his constituents during the pandemic, helping with unemployment benefits, helping our businesses to survive during this very difficult time.

People like me should not be punished for their hard work in making this District better.

We already know that 2022 will be very competitive for CD7. Keep in mind this District was considered a safe Republican seat, as I personally witnessed by the fact that, from 1994 until 2018, no Democrat was able to win an election. So what changed in 2018? Were there demographic changes in our District? Perhaps; but the biggest factor is that so many people were highly motivated to elect someone who would represent our interests. Did anyone reasonably claim the District is now a safe Democratic seat? Of course not, and we know that even without any changes to CD7 it will be a very hard-fought campaign on both sides.

I don't think it's appropriate to look at the voting in 2018 or 2020 to make assumptions about how people will be voting in 2022 and beyond. We lived through a very divisive period here in New Jersey and across this country. We shouldn't be making drastic changes to any of these districts based on an assumption that the 2018 and 2020 voting is an indication of a long-term political shift in political views. We only need to look at the 2020 election results to see how quickly the political winds shift.

I'm not asking to make CD7 a safe Democratic seat, as much as I might want that to happen. All I'm asking is to give us a fighting chance.

Thank you.

JUSTICE WALLACE: Thank you.

Devon Jiang, followed by Geri Modell.

DEVON JIANG: Hi; my name is Devon Jiang.

Before I begin, I would like to thank the Chair, along with the other 12 Commissioners, for allowing a West Windsor High School student to testify.

Given that there are so many people in this room from Congressional District 7, I thought that someone from the 12th Congressional District should be present and testifying. (laughter)

Forty-four percent -- that number is used to describe the Asian American growth in New Jersey over the past 10 years. One could analogize it as the fizz of a shaken soda, or Vin Gopal's usage of hair product before and after 2017. (laughter)

In 2010, there were 725,726 New Jerseyans who identified as *Asian*. Today, more than 1.05 million New Jerseyans are Asian. The growth of this coalition is undeniable, especially right here in the Asian paradise known as *Edison* (laughter). In 2019, the Asian population percentage of this municipality was 48.7 percent, up from 43.19 percent in 2010 and 29.27 percent in 2000. This exponential increase is seen throughout the entire Northeast Corridor. Somerset County had nearly a 60 percent increase between 2010 and 2019, resulting in more than 62,000 of the 328,000 individuals identifying as *Asian American*.

In my County, Mercer County, the Asian population rose from 32,752 to 52,733. In 2018, this State saw the election of the first Asian American Congressman in its delegation. This Redistricting Commission ought to cement these gains by, at the very least, adding an Asian-influenced District. There is no better example of why Asian Americans should have an influence district than the rise of Hispanic Americans. Based on the 2020 census, 18.8 percent of New Jerseyans were Asians; in the 2010 census,

Hispanics and Latinos comprised 15.2 percent of New Jersey's population. That Commission's iteration produced a map that gave a majority Hispanic-Latino district in Hudson County.

The same story seen one decade ago exists in the same way today, but with Asians. For decades, Asians have been ignored in politics and left to the dust. As a result, while 5.9 percent of Americans are Asian, only 16 out of the 435 districts are represented by Asians. And this Commission can do better, by securing an Asian-influenced district.

Now, why should New Jersey suddenly care about us? We're less engaged in politics than most other races, and supposedly are a less critical group. Frankly, it's surprising that I'm here today. (laughter) It's surprising that the son of immigrants from China is engaging in American politics, of all places. It's a stereotype that Asian Americans are a model minority -- that we work hard to make Goldman Sachs money. The truth is, though, like every American we have our day-to-day problems. The truth is, most Asians in America are not making six figures. The truth is, we work hard like everyone else. We do dumb things in high school like everyone else, and we have our own issues.

And yes, this assumption that we do not need any help blocks us from participating in politics. The lack of Asians in New Jersey politics is a reflection of outdated maps that ignore our voice. However, that does not mean that we don't want to influence the New Jersey Congressional Delegation. Andy Kim's presence rejects that assumption. His presence energized Asian Americans to vote in New Jersey's 3rd Congressional District.

In 2021, Asian Americans actively campaigned for Sadaf Jaffer

in the 16th Legislative District. Heck, even Cory Booker, who is not even Asian, received nearly \$400,000 of campaign contributions from Asian Democrats in the 2020 Presidential primary. Congressman Kim and incoming Assemblywoman Jaffer are inspirations to many New Jersey Asians. In particular, Mr. Kim was part of why I believe that a son of Asian immigrants could belong in the sphere of American politics. Many of the members on this Commission, especially minorities, recognize how effective representation is to their faith in government. Many of you know the feeling of representation because someone who looks like you knows your values. Many of you know the feeling of marginalization as well.

So I urge this Commission to not continue this precedent. Representation increases participation by everyone, not just those who have power and privilege. A New Jersey where adults from every racial background vote in tandem is a better democratic system. A New Jersey that ushers in the growth of Asian Americans is not only welcomed, but necessary. It is only fair for this Commission to implement a map that considers New Jersey's diversity and recognizes Asian Americans. A district that extends from Burlington, to West Windsor, to Edison is advantageous for everyone. Asian Americans in New Jersey would finally have a dependable voice, turnout in every election would increase, and neither party would have to sacrifice their districts.

I get that operatives want this Commission to shore up districts, and Camden Democrats don't like New Jersey's 1st Congressional District to be jeopardized. An Asian-influenced district, though, does not result in any change in partisanship or the results of the 2022 election. That said, by neglecting to add an Asian-influenced district, this Commission threatens the

hopes of rising second-generation Asian Americans like myself, who are interested in advocating for a better New Jersey, representing a *new* New Jersey.

This Commission would fail its goal of establishing districts that accurately represent this garden of diversity. Therefore, on behalf of Asian American New Jerseyans, and the municipality of West Windsor, I implore this Commission to serve justice to the Asian American community by adding an Asian-influenced district.

Thank you, and I yield my time.

JUSTICE WALLACE: Thank you.

Geri Modell, followed by Jeannette Mistretta.

GERI MODEL L: Good morning.

JUSTICE WALLACE: Good morning.

MS. MODEL L: Thank you for this opportunity to address you.

My name is Geri Modell. I live in New Jersey's 7th Congressional District, in the town of North Plainfield.

Let me tell you a bit about North Plainfield. We have a population of 22,000 that is possibly the most diverse in our District. Our racial makeup is divided among Hispanic, white, and African American. Almost half of the children in our town live in a household that speaks a language other than English. While 85 percent of us are high school graduates, only 26 percent of us have college degrees.

We are a town of teachers, truckers, longshoreman, retail workers, office workers, etc. Our median household income is just under \$70,000 a year.

My husband and I have lived in our house for 30 years, and we raised our son in that house. There is much that we love about our town, even though it has some struggles.

There are two specific challenges that I would like to bring to your attention. Our town of 2.82 square miles is carved up into three separate ZIP codes. What's worse, we share those ZIP codes with the neighboring city of Plainfield, which is in a different county and a different congressional district. Even worse, there are identical street names and addresses in both towns.

This may sound like a minor headache, but we have folks who rely on the mail for life-saving prescription medications, and don't receive it because it's sitting in a mailbox in Plainfield exposed to heat and rain.

We have townspeople who couldn't register for a COVID-19 vaccine on the Somerset County website because the State database showed their address and city in Union County.

People missed food deliveries during the pandemic, Christmas presents from loved ones, and so on. It feels, sometimes, as if our town doesn't exist.

The good news is, that we finally have a sympathetic ear and a partner in our current Congressman. He has met with representatives from North Plainfield to understand the problem, and he has committed to working with us to eventually have a single unique ZIP code for our town.

The second challenge I want to bring to your attention, which others have mentioned, is the Raritan Valley train line. The Plainfield and Netherwood train stations are easily accessible from North Plainfield, and residents of both our town and Plainfield rely on the train for work and

school. Before the pandemic, I regularly commuted five days a week into the City, and now I still use it, although a bit less frequently. Each time I take it, I hold my breath and pray as we enter the 100-year old tunnel. And each time I emerge from the tunnel, I am thankful that we now have a Congressman who is committed to ensuring that the Gateway Tunnel is finally built.

These two areas -- our problematic ZIP codes and our challenging and dangerous commute -- have posed serious quality of life issues for the people of North Plainfield. Now that we finally feel seen, and understood, and cared about, we ask you to please not break the continuity of our representation. Having a representative who is accessible, and present, and takes the time to understand our challenges and find solutions goes a long way in establishing trust in our democracy. Keep us whole, and keep our congressional District fair and competitive so that our lives and our votes matter.

JUSTICE WALLACE: Thank you.

Ms. Mistretta, followed by Linda Koskoski.

J E A N N E T T E M I S T R E T T A: Good morning.

I just have a statement to make, and a question to ask of you.

First of all, I want to thank you for the transparency on having these public meetings -- not like some other states in this country where one party takes control, and they decide how these elections are going to go.

People of New Jersey want and need Fair District maps. That's the job of this Commission. It's not your job to cure or keep a seat, or save a seat for a Republican or Democrat. It's to have diversity and, most of all, to make a district competitive so that people can have a fair chance -- the

people running and putting their lives on the line, and running to get elected. I, myself, have run four times. I come from Freehold Township. Impossible; owned by one party for 45 years.

I'm also represented -- I'm not as lucky as the 7th and some of these other districts -- in CD4, which is considered impossible to win. Though we have tried, it's owned by one person and one party. It's not fair; it's not competitive.

Some of the damage for redistricting and zonings that townships have done in the past have always been in putting, in particular, a lot of our minority communities -- they're always the ones at risk, especially involving environmental justice. But we can do better; you guys can do better. We're putting our faith and our hope in you to do that job.

I personally believe the census this year has been a disaster. I think it was deliberately stymied, delayed, and I don't believe our numbers are super accurate the way they should be; even though I know it has added a lot of people to the census. I, myself, signed up; I did everything I was supposed to do. I didn't get my birth certificate in, in time, to be out there doing the census. But a lot of my friends went out there. It was very hard to get people to come out -- you're in a worldwide pandemic. It was impossible. So I believe these numbers are less than they should be. And with that, it's a disservice to all the minority communities; and it's going to cost us a tremendous amount of money that we should have had to protect our communities and our people -- that we're not going to have because of these numbers. But you can try and make these corrections.

The one thing that I do ask of you is that -- and I'm sure you will, I hope you will -- take this job to heart seriously, and consideration to

be an example -- to make New Jersey an example, and not to be destructive in our mapping. And gerrymandering has got to stop. It is destroying the foundation of our country.

Thank you.

JUSTICE WALLACE: Thank you.

Our next speaker is Linda Koskoski, followed by Judi Knott.

L I N D A K O S K O S K I: Thank you, Judge Wallace, and members of the New Jersey Congressional Redistricting Commission, for holding this public hearing on this very important matter, and allowing me to be a part of it.

My name is Linda Koskoski, and I am the Council President in the Borough of Metuchen.

The important work before you is to make sure that a Congressional District map represents the people of New Jersey in the fairest way possible. I'm speaking here because of my strong belief that representation matters, and the will of the people must not be ignored. I felt so strongly about this that, when the time came, I volunteered to chair the Metuchen Census Committee, and I saw firsthand the hard work that went into making sure as many people as possible were counted so their voices could be heard.

As we all know, that work was made even more challenging because it took place during uncertain times, as the deadly pandemic began to unfold. However, those of us tasked with performing this sacred constitutional duty worked tirelessly to make sure we counted as many people as possible, because we believed it was our duty to make sure that New Jersey received its fair share of representation.

In my view, it would be unjust to undo the hard work put into the census just to draw a map that favors one political party over the other. The map should pass a nonpartisan gerrymandering test. That is to say, a fair map should take into consideration factors such as communities of interest, compactness, connectedness; and last but not least, continuity of representation, which I will address more fully in a moment. Undoing the will of the voters by drawing a map that favors one party over the other would disenfranchise the voters and simply be unfair, in my view.

As a local elected official, I also wanted to speak about how vitally important continuity of representation is to our residents, especially as it pertains to the Federal government. I see firsthand how consequential it is to have representatives who know and understand the unique needs of the communities they represent. For instance, I'm currently involved in the implementation of a federally funded road safety initiative, which I've been working on for about two years. And it will take another two years to see shovels in the ground -- I'm sure you're all familiar with this -- because federally funded projects and programs like this take years to complete. I believe that having our member of Congress involved throughout the process allows our community to realize the maximum benefit from that funding. And because our Congress member knows our community so well, our challenges as well as our dreams and aspirations, he makes sure that we know of any Federal programs, grants, or funding that might help as we move our community forward.

It is through the continuity of representation that this kind of strong working relationship can be developed, and how members of Congress can advocate so effectively on behalf of their constituents.

In closing, I ask that you take these key points under consideration as you complete your important work. I hope that you believe, as I do, that choosing our representatives should be up to the voters, and not a result of political partisan gerrymandering.

Thank you, again, for allowing me to participate, and for taking my comments into consideration.

Thank you.

JUSTICE WALLACE: And thank you.

Judi Knott, followed by Jeffrey Hurwitz.

J U D I K N O T T: Members of the Redistricting Commission, first I'd like to thank you for your service on this important Commission.

My name is Judi Knott, and I am a resident of Summit, New Jersey. I grew up on Long Island in a small town called Saint James. I have had a long interest in democracy, having been a political science major at the State University of New York at Albany. I was raised Roman Catholic, and I am godmother to three amazing nieces. I am a volunteer with SHIELD, a service which shopped for seniors during the height of the COVID epidemic, and I continue to shop for a couple who live in senior housing in Summit.

I'm a member of Summit Marches On and Summit Area Indivisible, where I volunteered my time combating voter disengagement and voter suppression through postcard efforts, phone banking, and canvassing. I'm also a marketing professional with over 30 years of marketing experience, primarily in the publishing industry.

In the 22-plus years that we have lived in Summit, we have seen a growing shift in the diversity of our community. We have seen Black, Hispanic, Asian and South Asian, and LGBTQ persons move to Summit. We

are a mix of many different cultures and faiths. These growing numbers of individuals and families represent a shift in demographics that cannot and should not be denied. To ignore these constituents would be doing a disservice to our community, and would marginalize a growing number of citizens who need representation.

Our District is already competitive. We are advocating for keeping our District intact and allowing us to compete fairly. I'm asking that you take into consideration our shared values before making any redistricting decisions, and before redrawing the District.

Thank you.

JUSTICE WALLACE: Thank you.

Jeffrey Hurwitz, followed by Arun Ayyagari.

J E F F R E Y H U R W I T Z: Good morning, Commissioners.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you.

My name is Jeff Hurwitz, and I've been a resident of Warren Township, Somerset County, since 1993 -- which, like so many others, is a member of the New Jersey 7th.

And I want to thank you for the important work you're doing here today, and I think that on such an unseasonably warm day that you had such a turnout, that we're seeing today, is an indication about how important the work is that you're doing; how seriously we consider it, and we know that you do as well.

Like so many others here today, I'm speaking out of a deep concern about the future of our democracy. It's not news that democracy in America is at risk. My heart still aches over January 6, along with being shocked and outraged. After 245 years, disturbingly, our democracy has

become fragile for a variety of reasons; probably the most fragile it's been since the Civil War. I'm sure you have your own list of reasons, but I note, among others, rising inequality; worries by some about losing their historical place in society; to, in some cases, an agenda-driven media that plays on fears and sews division and polarization; to, unfortunately, sometimes tribal opportunistic leaders who put party ahead of country.

As two of the most esteemed congressional scholars have said, Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein, there is another structural factor that has been mentioned many times here today that explains our delicate state -- and that's gerrymandering.

Competition is one of the hallmarks of our economy, and it's equally an oxygen of the political process. In safely drawn congressional districts, as you've heard, all the competition happens within a political party in the primaries, and not during, then, in the general. Safe districts result in lower voter turnout, both in the primaries and the general, triggering the "why bother?" sentiment among the voters; and often results in candidates from the favored party pandering to the more extreme views of energized primary voters. This ultimately results in electing candidates who often do not represent the mainstream views of their district.

Competitively drawn districts, though, combat this by requiring candidates to more broadly appeal to their constituents. Instead of a race to the bottom of extremism -- that we risk with safely drawn districts, and the horrific gridlock that it creates in D.C. at a time we all know that we just can't afford it -- competitively drawn districts help propel us to the mountain peak of sound values, wise policies, and responsible leadership.

That brings me to the 7th. As you've heard, the current District boundaries were drawn in 2010 at a time when Republicans held, in New Jersey, the majority of congressional seats, and to favor that party. Notwithstanding the structural headwind, Democrats now hold 10 of the 12 congressional seats. And this is not about being partisan. This includes the New Jersey 7th. What's important to me is that this makes a strong statement in my mind about the will of New Jersey voters today. Moreover, the 7th, as you've heard countless times, is currently the most competitive District in the nation, with the incumbent having won in 2020 by just under 1 percent. Because -- and this is the important point -- because of this competitiveness, the candidates, whether the incumbent or the challenger, will have to speak to all of the voters -- not just the hot-button issues of a more extreme few -- and that's to represent the District at large.

That is exactly the situation we have today in the 7th. Neither the incumbent nor the challenger can take their election or any of us for granted. They will have to earn our trust generally, and fight for us each and every day. Winning once will not become an annuity.

So I ask the Commission to keep the 7th a competitive District as it's currently drawn -- also adding in the undercount for the District as well -- one that does not favor one party or is redrawn to make other districts politically safe.

There's a second, other, quick factor I want to mention. You've heard other people talk about *continuity of community*. We've had one person speak about the environment and climate change. We know that climate change is no longer just on our doorstep, but has burst through the front door. While the 7th crosses a number of counties, they are united in the

environmental, economic, and social harms from a rapidly warming Earth. Hurricane Ida was just the latest and most tragic reminder of this; something I experienced personally, and maybe others in this room did as well, when my basement was flooded by a torrent of rain. To combat the effects of climate change, I personally, at considerable expense, have taken a number of actions. I've literally re-contoured our land; I reconfigured our basement; I put in new sump pumps. I've put in solar. I've put in efficient appliances and HVAC systems; and I even have an electric car. Wonderful. Me acting alone is not going to change the game. Today, at COP26, we have the nations -- the conference of the parties -- closing out their session on dealing with climate change. If we're going to win this fight, we have to win it together.

Back to Ida -- just 5 miles from my home that night, people on Route 22 abandoned their cars, and one teenage daughter watched helplessly as her mother was swept away to her death in Ida's torrential rains. This was Route 22, in Bridgewater, this past month. This climate-caused tragedy happened all over the 7th. Accordingly, it's important that we are united as a Congressional District, in our current form, to first hear from our representatives. "Do you accept the climate science and want to act on it, or do you buy into some myths and lies like, 'It's a hoax invented from abroad?'" We need people, then, who will then pursue the policies for the 7th, the State, and the country, who address the climate crisis, both to convert to sustainable energy, but also to fund the necessary adaptation work and the remediation when damage occurs.

I want to thank you very much for the hard job ahead of you. I certainly appreciate the time.

MS. FULLER: Thank You.

JUSTICE WALLACE: Thank you.

Now, this next group of individuals -- there's no indication whether or not you wish to testify, but you're certainly welcome to testify this morning.

They are Margaret Illis, Karen Kanter, Zoe McKelvey, and Bandana Rakhit. Is there anyone in that group who wishes to--

Yes; and state your name, please.

MARGARET ILLIS: Good morning.

I'm Margaret Illis, and I'm -- I've been a resident of Berkeley Heights in Union County for nearly 30 years. It's only the last few years that my vote mattered because CD7 is finally a competitive District.

When I read repeatedly in the press recently that the results of this process were already decided, I felt compelled to testify.

I thank you for holding these additional hearings beyond what is required, for taking the time, and for taking this task seriously and fairly. I note that as Commissioners you represent the people of New Jersey and the product of this Commission will affect residents for years to come. And I do thank you for the efforts that you're putting in.

As others have testified, gerrymandering to make safe Republican or Democratic districts takes away the voice of the people and the power of the ballot box. Voters are finally picking their representatives in CD7, and instead of it being a result of gerrymandering for one party or the other.

So I encourage you to not gerrymander, not make safe districts; but keep CD7 competitive, and increase the competitiveness of other districts as well.

Thank you.

JUSTICE WALLACE: All right, thank you.

Karen Kantor, Zoe McKelvey, and Bandana Rakhit. (no response)

All right; now, those who signed up today -- we have Benjamin Guy.

BENJAMIN GUY: Thank you for the opportunity.

My name is Benjamin Guy; I live in Franklin Township. That is currently in District 17, where I currently reside out of.

But I want to talk about a deeper issue, as far as redistricting is concerned.

So when we do the redistricting, a lot of times we just look at the people. We look at what it affects, as far as personal people who actually live in their specific districts and how it actually looks at them holistically. We don't look at the actual, overall communities altogether. And when I say it's by communities, it's because we look at the division of just data and numbers. We look at, "Hey, look, this population has grown." We don't see whether or not the has affected anything else besides that. We just look at the data.

The problem I have, a lot of times when we have these Commission meetings, is that most of the representatives here are not part of the districts that they redistrict off of, which kind of affects a lot of people who are here. And what I'm trying to say is, that, again, if we're going to look at how we're looking at this, we have to look at it from an equitable standpoint. We can't just look at it from a data standpoint. New Jersey has been divided too long. And again, these Commissions themselves are hurting, a lot of times, what's going on. And what it is, is we look to you for guidance.

A lot of times, when we try to have these meetings, this is the only time we can actually voice our opinions. Because, again, these meetings have been a subject over the last two years because of different outbreaks -- whether or not it's COVID, or whether or not it's Ida, or anything else. Offices have been closed. People want to be heard; that's why we've seen what's going on with elections now. If you guys are not getting a wake-up call from what's going on, you need to have a conversation with more of your constituents about equitable situations. You need to look at your redistricting for the last 40 years -- of how that's been handled. Because when you make a decision for 10 years of how people live, it affects their lifestyles; it affects them a lot.

And these Commission meetings need to happen more frequently; not just when things pop up. They need to be held, more or less, on a regular basis.

And we can go through the data statistics a lot of times -- what you'll hear about on your campaign as you have these down in South Jersey -- and you change these a lot as you go along. In the 1980s, we saw the destruction of some of the regulations and policies that go on when you change redistricting. We saw it in the 1990, we saw it the 2000s, and now we're seeing it when we're starting to build out utopias in certain societies or in certain counties that we're actually building out right here because of developer interest and everything else that's going on. It has nothing to do with the communities where they're actually doing them; it has to do with dollar figures.

And what we have to do is, we have to start looking at how we're looking at this whole process. This redistricting process is not bipartisan a

lot of times; it's politicized. If you hear everybody, mostly in this room, it's been politicized, because it's how people are feeling. And a lot of times in the State offices, you guys are not listening. And what it is, is we appreciate you having these open public meetings, but you need to be more in touch with the communities that they actually affect when you're making these decisions. And if you're not there to do it, you don't need to be here. And this is just how the residents and communities are starting to feel right now. That's why you're seeing the political races change a lot of times. If Sweeney didn't wake anybody in this election -- it shows you that, "Hey, look, it's not a game to be played with. People are going to be sitting here and are going to be watching now." So you need to be more engaged.

And my whole thing is, if you're looking at just population growth and you're making a decision on the census, it's not the thing that you need to be doing. No, you need to be working -- looking at public health issues, you need to be looking at a lot of other things that are going on in our community. If COVID didn't wake anybody up about that -- that's one consideration that you guys really need to be looking at.

You also need to be looking at the resources that are populating those specific districts also. Because a lot of times the old way of doing business-- We had the YMCAs or community centers in those areas -- they're not there anymore. Why? Because they can't be populated; it can't be done. So you're affecting these people. You're putting the pressure on a lot of local people when you have State and Federal money that is down here that can't be given because of how we redistricted. So these are things that you need to do.

One of the biggest commodities that we look at from a State standpoint, that we pin on redistricting, is education. How are we supposed to take care of our kids, or how are we supposed to take care of our families' futures if you guys keep changing every three to five years? Or the population density; or if we get in a fight about Republican/Democrat problems. You're not looking at this thing holistically; not at all. You're looking at it politically. And that's not fair to the communities that you're affecting.

So we need to look at this as an equitable situation. So I'm just saying, for you guys, and consideration-wise, if you don't know what you're doing, leave it alone. Leave the districts alone. Let the people figure it out. And that's just the reality of the situation.

Thank you.

JUSTICE WALLACE: Thank you.

Judith Roff.

JUDITH ROFF: Hello.

JUSTICE WALLACE: Good morning -- good afternoon.

MS. ROFF: My name is Judith Roff.

Thank you for having these open hearings, and I want to thank the local political club that I'm a member of for directing us to come here, and explaining the whole process.

I have never made a public statement of any kind in a political forum. I volunteer, but this is my first time on the record.

So many people here have been very eloquent about many of the things that I feel are important as well. And proper districting is key to the health of our democracy.

I am a member of the 7th District; I live in Raritan Township.

It is important to keep districts competitive so that the candidates who run, as has been said, are responsible to listen -- they have to listen to the people.

I also believe the Township should not be divided because that makes it very difficult to -- makes it very difficult to get resources and for people to understand who is representing them.

I think more and more people are becoming aware of the importance of redistricting, and the damage that gerrymandering can do. And I think that could be why you see so many people here.

So we will be paying very close attention, and I hope that you guys can work well together and do a good job for the State of New Jersey.

Thank you very much.

JUSTICE WALLACE: Thank you.

MS. FULLER: Thank you.

JUSTICE WALLACE: Marc Ramrekha.

M A R C R A M R E K H A: Hello, members of the Commission.

Thank you for giving us this opportunity to testify.

My name is Marc. I live in Highland Park; I have my entire life. I am 21 years old, a junior at Rutgers University, and I just want to talk about the 6th District, which is my District.

As you can see, I'm an Asian American, and in New Jersey that is a very rapidly growing demographic. Think about where we are -- we're in Edison, I think one of the largest Asian-populated towns in the state, if not the largest. And then if you look at the neighboring towns -- like Piscataway, South Plainfield, East Brunswick, Milltown, and then down into Mercer County -- you look at towns like Plainsboro, Princeton.

The data is written on the walls. There is a very clear rise in the Asian American population, and I think that it is very important that this Commission draws a district that considers that. A district in Central Jersey needs to be representative of the Asian community that is rapidly growing, and to accomplish that I think the 6th District needs to encompass Middlesex County, Somerset County, and Mercer County.

The way it is drawn right now, it includes Monmouth County and part of the Shore; and I believe that combining Monmouth County and Middlesex County just combines two completely different communities of interest. The Shore is very different from Middlesex; and I think that the 6th District, moving forward, should include Somerset and Mercer, and not combine Middlesex and Monmouth. That is the most important in creating a district that is actually representative of Central Jersey. I think the way it's drawn right now definitely favors political parties and incumbents, and that's not something that should be considered when redrawing us.

Thank you.

JUSTICE WALLACE: Thank you.

Director Robinson.

Director.

S H A N E L Y. R O B I N S O N: Good afternoon.

JUSTICE WALLACE: Good afternoon.

DIRECTOR ROBINSON: I actually come wearing two hats; my first hat as the Somerset County Commissioner Director. I'm here not only to hear the constituents that represent CD12 and CD7 and the municipalities in which I serve. But also to encourage you and implore you that you are the voices in the room that have to make the decision. But let the voices of the

residents be the resounding voice in the room. That's what you're here to do. You have a job, but also the residents have a voice and a choice. And we want to make sure that we're doing all that we can for the people of New Jersey.

The second hat that I wear is as a resident in CD12 and LD17 -- leave my District alone. (laughter)

Thank you.

JUSTICE WALLACE: Thank you.

David Kaaret.

D A V I D K A A R E T: Hello, my name is David Kaaret. I've lived in Berkeley Heights since 1993, and my comments are focused on District 7

I really have two points to make.

The first one is, one of the factors damaging democracy today is that most representatives are in safe seats and do not need to worry about public opinion. This means they can support extreme policies and engage in dangerous and unprofessional activities, and still be reelected.

I think the Redistricting Commission should focus its energy on avoiding this, and not making safe seats.

And the second is, New Jersey has a reputation for being corrupt, with machines running policies and elections determined by the politically connected, and not by the will of the voters. I understand the Chair of the last Commission -- is that he agreed to a safe seat for Leonard Lance in the 7th because he was a personal friend.

Since then, the District has evolved, and it's no longer a safe seat. To gerrymander the 7th District to make it a safe seat, because a politically powerful member of the establishment wants the seat, would make it clear

that New Jersey has a corrupt, politically run machine, and the Commission should not do this.

Thank you.

JUSTICE WALLACE: I thank you for your comments.

Now that concludes my list. Is there anyone present who I did not call who did wish to testify? (no response)

All right, thank you.

I would like to announce that our next public session will be held this coming Monday at Rowan University in Glassboro. It will begin at 6 p.m. on Monday.

Any additional comments from any members of the Commission? (no response)

Hearing none, do I have a motion to adjourn?

MR. STEINHARDT: Motion.

JUSTICE WALLACE: Is there a second?

MS. FULLER: Second.

JUSTICE WALLACE: It's been moved and seconded.

All those in favor, voice and say "aye." (affirmative responses)

Thank you very much; have a safe trip, everyone, back to your homes.

(MEETING CONCLUDED)