

Justin Lee
22 Pell Street, Apartment 3
New York, NY 10013

New York State Independent Redistricting Commission Testimony

July 26, 2021

Good afternoon. My name is Justin Lee, and I am a law student at New York University and a resident of 22 Pell Street in Manhattan's Chinatown. I also regularly volunteer in the Chinatown community with Asian Americans for Equality (AAFE), and through them, I help provide the necessities of life like food and clothing, to the most vulnerable members of my community. I am also the third generation of my family that has called Chinatown home.

And it is through AAFE and the APA VOICE Redistricting Task Force, that I learned how harmful separate representation of all of New York's Asian American communities could be.

Esteemed Commissioners, I come before you today to ask you to preserve Chinatown as a whole within the 65th Assembly District and the 7th U.S. Congressional District.

Doing so would strengthen our community at a time that we are increasingly vulnerable.

Even as the city opens up more and New Yorkers and tourists alike stream back into Chinatown, taking in everything that we have to offer: the cuisine, the atmosphere, and an Instagram backdrop to die for, *the need in our community has not abated.*

This is because the last year and a half have only highlighted the pain that has been here all along.

The affordable housing that has so long made this place a refuge for immigrant families is under siege. The steady tide of gentrification continues to drive deeper into our community and erode what makes this place such a special part of the tapestry that is New York City.

Now, as ever, our population, especially our elders, need access to government social services and emergency aid just to make ends meet so that they need not live without just reward for all that they have given our city.

And, lastly, the rise in anti-Asian violence should outrage people of conscience across our state, and Chinatown needs the opportunity to raise up champions to fight these outrages all the way to the highest levels of government.

It is in times like these in which we need our voices to be heard in the political process.

Maintaining Chinatown as a whole within the 65th Assembly District and the 7th U.S. Congressional District would help to do this. It would help unlock the power of the AAPI community at the ballot box. It would also help provide us with fair representation in government—something which has been tragically lacking.

From my earliest memories in my grandfather's restaurant on Bayard Street, I have always loved Chinatown, with all of its characters, its quirks, and all of what it has represented to my family and untold legions like mine. I hope that preserving Chinatown through this process and making sure it has the voice it deserves in the halls of government will ensure that it continues to grow and prosper for many years to come.

And so, Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify today.