

May 2, 2022

Remarks of Leon Goldenberg on behalf of Kings County's Orthodox Jewish, Hasidic and Russian speaking communities

Harkenrider v. Hochul. Case No. E2022-0116CV

I am writing on behalf of the Agudah Israel of America, which is a national advocacy group, advocating for the Orthodox Jewish community, as well as on behalf of the Council of Jewish Organizations of Flatbush, a nonprofit social service agency which provides food, housing, health care, social and financial support for the community

I am an Orthodox Jew living in the Flatbush section of Kings County. It is important for the Court to consider developing new congressional districts in Kings County that accurately reflect the needs and concerns of the county's Orthodox, Jewish, Hasidic, and Russian communities.

Brooklyn

The Orthodox largely Yiddish speaking population is not properly represented. This encompasses Boro Park, Greater Flatbush/Marine Park, Williamsburg and Crown Heights. It is our desire to be concentrated in two districts, including those now represented by Representatives Hakeem Jeffries and Jerrold Nadler.

In the last redistricting, we were packed into small parts of single districts but, more accurately, "cracked" into having any meaningful voice in a smaller more concentrated number of districts, especially and importantly at the congressional level where the Orthodox population is dispersed in 5 different districts (now represented by Representatives Clarke, Nadler, Jeffries, Malliotakis, and Velasquez).

We are a community that includes Russian speaking populations. Our communities should be afforded the opportunity to participate in the political process and to elect candidates of our choice even though we are not considered as a protected class under the Voting Rights Act. Even though the criteria coverage for racial and language minorities may not apply directly, they should apply in practice.

Our Yeshivas in Brooklyn have 75,000 children. When I graduated in 1965 there were 3 Yeshivas in Borough Park. Today there are 75 Yeshivas.

Rockland and Orange Counties

The same applies to our sister communities in Rockland and Orange County. Orthodox Jewish, largely Yiddish speaking from Chestnut through Airmont, Suffern, Montebelo, Wesley Hills, New Square, Spring Valley, Monsey – these are heavily Orthodox/Yiddish speaking areas. Some of the census tracks include 11601, 12203, 12204, 11506, 11505.

Going into Orange County – Kiryas Joel, Tuxedo, New Castle and Mount Cisco. The census tracks are 11535, 11503, 11505, 13104.

I have spent my entire life involved in the community.

I am well known throughout the Orthodox community and there is not one City, State and Federal legislator who represents any part of the Orthodox community and who doesn't know who I am on a first name basis.

At the end of the day, we are small geographic slivers in several districts, possibly reaching 12% to 17% of multiple districts in state legislative and congressional district maps.

In the N.Y. City Council and State Legislature, we are divided into so many different districts that you need a scorecard to see who is representing which of our communities. I meet with our elected officials on a regular basis, but when you represent only 10% or 15% of a district, they listen politely but don't always follow through and we don't have proper representation.

Orthodox, Hasidic, and Russian Jews don't wish to be packed but certainly don't wish to be cracked. We are looking for a critical mass in as many as two congressional districts. Unless our communities have a much larger and significant population in a district, we become marginalized and serve as filler for other districts.

Lending a concerned ear is very nice but action and results are much more critical to our community. Those of us in Kings County's Orthodox communities do a tremendous job of taking care of our neighbors whether it is Council of Jewish Organizations, Tomche Shabbos, the Hatzolah ambulance corps, and the Flatbush Communal Fund that end of taking care of critical issues. We need government help and the surest way to get that is through proper representation. We do not have that if our communities are split up into several congressional districts where the elected members are nonresponsive to our needs.

We have common interests in our Yeshivas, synagogues, service centers, and shopping areas. They are the bedrock of our communities' economy.

You will find very few district offices for any legislators in any of our communities.

Our population has exploded to a point that Kings County can no longer sustain and house everyone. Tens of thousands of our families have had to move out of New York City but it is still not enough. We desperately need more housing. Better and more effective congressional representation can help us achieve that goal through congressional districts that truly include communities of interest.

Thank you for your consideration of our request.



Leon Goldenberg