

## **New York State Senate Majority Conference**

### **Senate Legislative Task Force on**

#### **Demographic Research and Reapportionment**

**Tuesday, December 14, 2010**

#### **Testimony of Vishnu Mahadeo**

##### **Richmond Hill Economic Development Council**

Good afternoon honorable panel:

My name is Vishnu Mahadeo and I am the president of the Richmond Hill Economic Development Council – Richmond Hill EDC which is the defacto Indo Caribbean Chamber of Commerce and Social umbrella. The RICHMOND HILL EDC is a not-for-profit organization of merchants, business people, service providers, elected officials and other community members working together to advance the business, cultural, social, educational and civic welfare of the South East Neighborhood of Queens; Richmond Hill, South Ozone Park and Ozone Park.

Who is an Indo Caribbean? Indo Caribbeans are a community of about 500,000 people in the USA (see attachment) who have come from India to the Caribbean since 1838, and made a second migration to the USA starting about 50 years ago. Although we come mainly from Guyana, Trinidad & Tobago and Suriname, we have a distinct mixture of Indian-Caribbean culture and heritage with a distinctive and pronounced Indian influence. There are over 250,000 in queens alone and approximately 100,000 in the Richmond Hill / South Ozone Park / Ozone Park area. Despite these numbers, there is no Indo Caribbean in the City Council or in the New York State Assembly or in the NYS Senate or in the US Congress. The reason is simple, Gerrymandering.

The Indo Caribbean people have been split into 2 US Congressional Districts (CD 6 & 9), 2 NY Senate Districts (SD 10 & 15) and 5 NYS Assembly Districts (AD 23, 25, 31, 32 & 38) and 4 City Council Districts (CO 28, 29, 30 & 32). This has diluted the Indo Caribbean vote and prevented any Indo Caribbean candidate from winning a seat. This willful splitting of communities of common interest has created a system of disenfranchisement for the Indo Caribbean community as their votes are less effective or ineffective. Gerrymandering for the purpose of insuring minority representation has been upheld by the United States Supreme Court. The present form of Gerrymandering is in violation of the Supreme Court ruling as it is depriving a minority from representation. Due to our lack of any political power we are a community paying among the highest per square foot taxes in Queens. We have the worst High Schools in Queens (Richmond Hill High School and John Adams High School) not on behavioral issues but on poor academic performance with its over-crowding a major contributor. We are significant contributors to all the local Political Leaders yet a small or negligible fraction of discretionary funds comes to the Indo Caribbean community. There is not one elevator or escalator at any train station serving the Indo Caribbean community. At present both the city, state and federal government are in violation of the Voting Act, as the Indo Caribbean community has purposely been deprived of any representation.

I call upon this august body to correct this injustice, or we will be forced to bring this matter to the courts.

Recommendation:

I am also calling on this Senate Legislative Task Force to use the boundaries of on the East - Van Wyck Expressway, on the West – Woodhaven Blvd., on the South – Belt Parkway and on the North – Hillside/Jamaica Avenues. This will allow our community a true voice in the NYS Assembly and NYS Senate.

I thank you for this opportunity to present to the Senate Legislative Task Force on behalf of the Indo Caribbean community. I am happy to answer your questions.

Thank you

# Richmond Hill Economic Development Council

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## Cen\$u\$ 2010

### Help our Community – *BE COUNTED*

Press Release

03/03/2010

Full page advertisements for United States Census 2010 are currently appearing in many newspapers in the US. It mentions the importance of being counted and assures that the US law “protects confidentiality” of the respondents. It also assures that the **Immigration Department - ICE, IRS, FBI, CIA or the local police will not have access to any of the information in the Census document.**

The 2010 Census is a count of everyone living in the United States and is mandated by the U.S. Constitution. Whether you are a citizen, **legal or illegal immigrant, on tourist visa or H1-B visa, or even have no visa**, the law encourages everyone on US soil to respond to the Census 2010 questionnaire. The Indo Caribbean community in the US can “help improve schools, increase job training and get its share of over \$400 billion per year in federal funds” provided **every household** answers 10 simple questions and mails the Census questionnaire back to the Census Bureau.” Large majority of people will get the short form with ten questions while some, randomly selected, will be surveyed in depth. However, the usefulness of the information will directly relate to the accuracy with which you respond to each of the questions.

Thirty years ago, the U.S. Census Bureau counted **115,948** Guyanese, Trinidad & Tobago and Suriname living in the United States. This number was 0.05 percent of 226.5 million US population in 1980. The Indo Caribbean community predominantly comprised of people who ancestors are from India and who migrated from Guyana, Trinidad & Tobago and Suriname and adopted the USA as their new homeland. **The Indo Caribbean community is more than 50% of the migration from Guyana, Trinidad & Tobago and Suriname.** Ten years later, as per the 1990 Census, the number of Guyanese, Trinidad & Tobago and Suriname rose to **239,268**, more than double the previous count. By then, the community also included a large number of those who were born and raised in the United States of America. **In 2000, the Census count of Guyanese, Trinidad & Tobago and Suriname (born abroad) 414,166 slightly less than double the 1990 Census count.** This number however does not include those that were born in this country of Guyanese, Trinidad & Tobago and Surinamese parentage nor does it include the Un-Documented. It is safe to conclude that in 2000 there were more than 500,000 people who are from Guyana, Trinidad & Tobago and Suriname living in the USA. It is projected that, if all is counted in **Census 2010, we will have approximately 1 Million people from Guyana, Trinidad & Tobago and Suriname and hence 500,000 Indo-Caribbean.**

The 2010 Census is again a number-dependent game. We can participate in it to our advantage by having a complete and accurate count of our community. In March 2010, the Census Bureau will mail Census questionnaire to all households in the U.S. The Indo Caribbean community has an edge as we are now all in agreement to use the Indo Caribbean as our race.. All Indo Caribbean should make a sincere effort to complete the Census questionnaire and return before the April 1 deadline. The Indo Caribbean community can use its numerical strength to demand its fair share of the funds, services allocation pie and at the State level be accounted for in the 2011 Re-Districting. The increased number can be effectively considered as our community's strength and clout. An accurate count of Indo Caribbean community in the United States could translate into dollars flowing for services to our community during the next ten years. It could also mean increased number of political appointments at federal, state and city level for Indo Caribbean Americans. This is truly our chance to be properly and accurately counted as part of the fabric of American life.

It is imperative that Indo Caribbean check the box titled “Asian Indian” and write-in “Indo Caribbean” in response to question 9 on the Census form for an accurate count of the Indo Caribbean population in the US.

The Indo Caribbean activists in 1980, 1990 and 2000 voiced their concerns that our community count was not correctly reported. The Census Bureau would like to avoid the pitfalls of the previous Census. Millions of dollars are being poured into advertisements and billions more in hiring temporary staff for Census related work. A multicultural outreach campaign has already been launched. Publicity in the ethnic media, including Caribbean media, has already started and that factor can help in convincing foreign-born residents to respond to the Census questionnaire promptly – and **without reservation or fear**. Since the Census Bureau is determined to have complete and accurate count of all US households, the census takers will go door-to-door to count residents who fail to return their form by April 1.

If a Census worker knocks on your door, make sure that he/she has a badge, a handheld device, a Census Bureau canvas bag and a confidentiality notice. Do not hesitate to see his/her identification and badge before answering any questions. Also, A Census worker will not contact you by e-mail. So, do not click on a link or open any attachments in an e-mail which are supposedly from the U.S. Census Bureau. A word of caution from Better Business Bureau and law agencies. Be cooperative with the U.S. Census workers but do not give sensitive financial information. It is the scanners who could be impersonating Census workers to gain access to your Social Security, bank account or credit card numbers.

The U.S. Census Bureau also depends on voluntary help to spread the message to the masses. We have formed the Complete Count Committee (CCC) of volunteers to increase awareness of the 2010 Census and motivate residents in the Indo Caribbean communities to respond. This CCC's plan and implement census awareness campaigns that cater to the special characteristics of our community. A number of CCCs are already functional and more are forming. If interested in organizing a committee, you can call the regional census center or visit [www.2020.census.gov](http://www.2020.census.gov).

In the past, Indo Caribbean organizations played a significant role in spreading the Census message. They created grassroots outreach efforts geared toward reaching every segment of the Indo Caribbean population. However, the community activists and cultural, social and religious organization heads cannot and should not take past achievements for granted. During the last few years, many Indo Caribbean organizations have gained more visibility, recognition and respectability and can play a major role in Census 2010. The leaders of all Indo Caribbean organizations, national or local, religious or social, political or professional, should band together to increase awareness about the census and work towards full participation of Indo Caribbean community. They need to create awareness and highlight the benefits about the upcoming census count and provide leadership in addressing the Census issue on timely basis.

The community activists will be failing in their responsibility if they do not educate and encourage members of the Indo Caribbean community for one hundred percent response to the Census questionnaire. They **must convince the Un-Documented to fill-out the Census forms**. They should identify and convince those who are hesitant or holdouts, and ensure that they stand up to be counted. They must understand that their objective is clearly defined, a full enumeration of people of Indo Caribbean origin. Any inaction and timidity in pursuing that objective boldly and vigorously can result in less than deserved local community financing, representation and services for next ten years.

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## **Richmond Hill Economic Development Council – RHEDC**

### **MISSION:**

The RICHMOND HILL EDC is a not-for-profit organization of merchants, business people, service providers, elected officials and other community members working together to advance the business, cultural, social, educational and civic welfare of the South East Neighborhood of Queens, New York. The Richmond Hill EDC was incorporated in 2009. Our mission is to assist in the revitalization and redevelopment of Liberty Avenue from the west side of the Van Wyck Expressway to the east side of Woodhaven Boulevard. The Richmond Hill EDC will utilize strategies aimed at enhancing the economic, physical, cultural, educational and social environments.

### **ACCOMPLISHMENT:**

- The Richmond Hill EDC was an active partner with the Richmond Hill Census 2010 Complete Count Committee during the US Census 2010 program.
- Working with the MTA for an elevator on the “A” train at the Lefferts Blvd. Stop.
- Developing a safer Liberty Ave Exit on Van Wyck Expressway with the NYCEDC & NYCDOT.
- Developing relationship with Resort World NY, formerly the Aqueduct Raceway.

### **Contact Information:**

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