

Census Hearing Testimony  
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Hello everyone,

My name is Farzana Linda, I am the Advocacy & Organizing Manager at Chhaya CDC. Chhaya is a nonprofit located in Jackson Heights and Richmond Hill. Our mission is to build housing stability and the economic well being of the South Asian and Indo Caribbean community. Chhaya is an active member of NY Counts 2020 and the Queen's Boro Presidents Complete Count Committee. Chhaya is also a Co-leader of the APA Complete Counts Committee.

For much of our history, Asian American communities have been kept invisible. From Chinese laborers who built our country's infrastructure only to be denied the right to emigrate by the Chinese exclusion act to South Asian farmers in 1800s New Orleans who were denied rights of citizens because they weren't white, Asian Americans have consistently been othered and uncouncted.

Today the trend continues: one in four Asian American New Yorkers live in poverty, but these families are invisible to the system. In a city where 14% of its population is Asian American, only 2% of funding for social services goes to them. And within that, a significant portion of the South Asian and Indo Caribbean population has little to no access to those services.

Asian Americans historically have some of the lowest response rates on the census, so it is no surprise that we have fewer resources and poorer services for our communities. Richmond Hill has some of the most undercounted census tracts with a response rate of less than forty percent and as a result is one of the most underserved areas of Queens.

Lack of awareness, fear, language barriers, the disconnection to social services are some of the leading reasons for a low response rate. Additionally, given the anti immigrant and xenophobic climate, there is complete mistrust in how census data is used.

Given this history and track record coupled with the potential addition of a citizenship question, and not to mention the Census Bureau has significantly less funding to hire

enumerators and will only be hiring US citizens--the chances of an undercount of the South Asian and Indo Caribbean community are higher than ever before.

In the last Census, Chhaya learned many lessons that made it clear that in order for people to respond, they need to trust in the process. This means learning about the census and being supported to fill it out by people from their own community and those who speak their language. In Census 2010, Chhaya played a leading role in being that bridge and partnering with community groups, leaders and other stakeholders for census outreach with the South Asian and Indo Caribbean community.

Census 2020 has significant barriers and disincentives. The only way our communities will be motivated to fill out the census is if there are multiple touch points. It's very simple, the amount of funding to organizations like Chhaya and many other community based groups will have a direct impact on participation rates in our communities. The Census bureau, the city, and many others have all recognized the critical role trusted community groups play. But we cannot do this work without being funded. Your commitment to a complete count in NYC, in Queens will be measured by the funding you allocate directly to us.