REDISTRICTING TESTIMONIAL STATEMENT
March 10, 2011 – Essex County

Presented by Ronald L. Rice
New Jersey State Senator and Chairman of the New Jersey Legislative Black Caucus

I want to thank the committee for giving me an opportunity to go on record today regarding the **2011 redistricting** of the legislative districts here in New Jersey.

In 1986, when I was elected and entered the New Jersey State Senate it was the *first time in the history of the state that two(2) African-Americans ever sat in the senate house and chambers at the same time to represent communities of interest with a large middle class, low-wage earners and destitute population.*

Imagine that, in the history of this state, it was not until 1986, that *two black senators out of a forty (40) member legislature had ever sat at the same time* in the New Jersey State Senate to represent a community of interest with a history of struggle and civil rights violations.

Today, in 2011 there are only **four (4)** African-American senators out of a forty member legislature. There are only **eleven (11)** African-American legislators in the New Jersey General Assembly.

To me and many taxpayers and voters in this state, this is *disgraceful and continues to reflect the political bias* of the Democratic and Republican Party.

It is also a reflection of the bias of the Democratic and Republican political party's state and county chairpersons; some *corrupt political bosses* lurking behind the scenes, and the politics of *wealthy political candidates* and *powerbrokers.*

In 2001 in the **26th legislative district,** for example, (at that time – Newark's West Ward, Irvington, Maplewood, South Orange and some other districts in parts of Newark), the lines drawn to change the district boundaries were drawn because some political bosses did not like me personally simply because they could not control me. Thus, a *community of interest that had the opportunity to elect a candidate of their choice for years, an African-American Senator, was all of a sudden denied that opportunity because powerbrokers and party bosses didn't like the community of interest choice.*

The district lines were drawn to eliminate me as the incumbent senator and candidate of choice by *removing a substantial number of residents that made up the community of interest* for whom I speak up for and where I still live. I had represented this community of interest, my neighbors in one capacity or another for years.

The district was supposed to be *drawn to pit one minority against another minority;* an African-American Senator against a Latino Assemblyman.
The assembly candidate was even moved from one town (South Orange) in the old 28th legislative district to a section of Newark were some political bosses wanted the new lines to be drawn.

In drawing the new line in the twenty eight (28th) legislative district, with a population of approximately twenty thousand (20,000) residents in Newark who are to this day my neighbors were denied an opportunity they had enjoyed since 1982, electing an African-American senator and a candidate of choice.

I was only the second African-American male to ever serve in the State Senate. The first served in 1966 under a different form of government.

The 1965 Voting Rights Act, as well as the basic principles and rules in drawing legislative boundaries must be adhered to in the drawing of the new map.

The district must be drawn by simply moving the boundary lines; not by tacking or gerrymandering.

The rule and principle of contiguity that creates a district where you can travel from any point in the district to any other point in the district without crossing the district boundary must be adhered to where all parts of the district are connected.

Contiguity is one of the most common rules for drawing district lines.

Another traditional redistricting principle that must be taken into consideration "compactness."

Compactness is the common rule for drawing a district that directly addresses the district’s geometric shape. A district is generally considered compact if it has a fairly regular shape with constituency all living relatively near each other.

Presently, in my district I live on the last street in the West Ward of Newark touching the township of Irvington (which is also my district). However, in the city of Newark, my neighbors, a community of interest who live three (3) blocks from my house can no longer vote for me as their candidate of choice. For over sixteen (16) years they had that choice and in 2001 that choice was taken away from them.

In closing, I want the committee to know that our civil rights organizations, members of the New Jersey Legislative Black Caucus and members of our communities will not allow any violations of the 1965 Voting Rights Act in general and particularly section 2 of the act which speaks to practices that denies minorities an opportunity to get elected.

As an incumbent senator and victim of the redistricting process, as well as chairman of the New Jersey Legislative Black Caucus working with our civil rights organizations, the United States Justice Department, state-wide clergy members and communities of interest
in general, I want the record to reflect that the “hue and cry” of the Black Community is that the drawing of the new legislative boundaries does not violate:

- The 1965 Voting Rights Act - section 2. *Which among other things prohibits laws and/or practices that deny minority voters an equal opportunity to participate in the political process and to elect representatives of their choice.*

- The basic principle and rules of redistricting. *(Such as community of interest, contiguous, and compactness.)*

I want the record to reflect that on behalf of our taxpayers, voters and residents in general, that we expect the new map to be:

- *Fair and Just. (People of color should not be disenfranchised under the new map.)*

- *Meet the goal of protecting the interest of minority voters and candidates who are continuously disenfranchised and the victims of voter fraud.*

*Minority incumbents and candidates should not be pitted against each other as we are hearing may be the discussion and conversation some members of this committee with other).*

Finally, looking at and analyzing the census data most of the minority incumbents’ legislative districts do not need to be changed substantially.

*Where changes based on the diminution of the population or increases in population exist, the necessary change needed to meet the 220,000 population number with a 5% deviation (210,000/230,000) is very minimum.*

It is clear to those of us analyzing the new census data that adjustments only need to be made in approximately fourteen (14) legislative districts:

- *Districts: 2, 3, 9,12,14,17, and 30 where the population has increased.*

- *Districts: 10, 11, 15,27,29,32 and 34 were the population has decreased.*

For the record and for the public, I am respectfully requesting that the maps that this committee could not agree on be made public immediate for our review; and that all future maps be made public.

This completes my statement and I thank you for listening.
Good afternoon everyone.

I want to start by thanking everyone on this commission for taking the time to serve in this important effort to shape our state for the next decade to come.

I’d also like to thank everyone offering testimony at this public hearing for providing their valuable thoughts and ideas.

This is truly an example of democracy at work.

I’m happy to be here today in Trenton, our historic capital city.

I’ve had the honor of working in this building as an Assemblyman for the 17th Legislative District since 2002.

It’s been an honor to work here as we strive to improve the lives of New Jersey residents, and it’s been an honor to have served with such a diverse group of legislators from throughout New Jersey.

But it’s also been an honor because I know I’ve filled a unique role in this Legislature.
• If you don’t mind me taking a minute, let me tell you a bit about myself.

• I was born in a town called Nellore, India.

• I grew up in India and attended college there before coming to America to get a master’s degree in electrical engineering from the City College of New York.

• But public policy has always been something of great interest to me, so in 1997, I was elected to the Franklin Township Council.

• In 2001, I had the distinct privilege of becoming the first South Asian American elected to the New Jersey General Assembly and the fourth Indian-American in the United States to be elected to state office.

• This was all made possible by the newly diverse legislative map that was drawn up that year.

• Now serving my fifth term, I am chairman of the Assembly Telecommunications and Utilities Committee.

• I am also a Deputy Speaker in the Assembly.
• It’s been a great experience, and I have the people of the 17th Legislative District to thank for giving me this opportunity.

• And it’s a district, by the way, that shows the importance of creating opportunities for all New Jerseyans.

• We must keep in mind that Asian American population is the fastest growing at 51% and is currently at 8.2 growing from 5.7 percent in 2000.

• Also, Asian American Voters grew 54 percent since 2000 and now make up 8.1 percent of the total voting age population versus 5.6 percent in 2000.

• In this global economy, Asian Americans play a key role and need appropriate representation in the legislature to promote international trade.

• I am fortunate to represent an extremely diverse 17th District is district with white residents making up 37% of the district's voting age population.

• Asian (22%), Hispanic (22%) and African-American (21%) residents make up a total of 63% percent of the voting age population.

• Despite this diversity, the district has elected an Asian-American Assemblyman – me - consistently by
a strong coalition of white voters voting with Asian, African-American and Hispanic voters.

- During the past decade, Democratic candidates for governor and the state legislature have averaged above 63 percent of the vote in the district, regardless of race.

- This underscores the success of drawing a racially diverse district while not packing in voters of any one particular race.

- Any plan to pack African-Americans, Latinos, Asian-Americans and other minorities into their own separate districts would give us a Legislature that does not reflect New Jersey’s reality.

- It would give us a Legislature, in fact, built on an un-American foundation.

- The experience of the last 10 years has vindicated the creation of districts that enable more opportunities for minority candidates.

- That has served New Jersey well.

- In the past decade, we’ve seen Six Latinos, all Democrats, to the State Legislature. A Cuban-American Democrat as New Jersey’s first Latino
Assembly Speaker. The first African American female Speaker, also a Democrat.

• Is our work done? Of course not.

• But no one can deny the progress we’ve made.

• And no one can argue that packing minorities into their own districts would represent progress.

• It would represent a step backwards.

• It would delete all the advancements we’ve made.

• Quite simply, that cannot happen.

• So as you move toward completing your work, I would urge everyone to do so with this in mind – our Legislature must reflect the great opportunities our great state offers.

• We need a fair map that reflects reality, not one that recalls the outdated thinking of the past.
I would like to see meaningful representation for communities and voters in New Jersey.

I was born in Montreal Canada, married an American and moved to the USA. A friend of mine and a chairwoman of the Manalapan Zoning Board got me involved in a local issue affecting my town. I decided I would get involved on this issue ending up attending legal proceedings at the Superior, Appellate and Supreme Court here in Trenton. I WAS NOT A CITIZEN YET. Manalapan Township won the case, precedent case law was written and at that juncture I decided to apply for Citizenship so I would have a voice and vote on issues affecting my family and community in the future. In 1994-95 I applied & took the citizenship test. Subsequently, I was proudly made a US Citizen at a ceremony held in Camden, NJ.

I believe your Vote is a precious, powerful right and certainly believe in one vote = one person. Anything other than that is unrepresentative of the voting public.

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Manalapan, NJ 07726  
(732) 616-5585
Cape May
West Cape May
Cape May Point
Lower
Middle
Wildwood
West Wildwood
Wildwood Crest
North Wildwood
Stone Harbor
Avon
Sea Isle City
Dennis
Woodbine
Upper
Ocean City
Maurice River
Commercial
Downe
Vineland
Millville
Lawrence
Fairfield
Deerfield
Upper Deerfield
pop+1695

Corbin City
Estell Manor
Weymouth
Egg Harbor
Somers Point
Linwood
Northfield
Pleasantville
Abescon
Longport
Margate City
Ventnor City
Atlantic City
Brigantine
Galloway
Port Republic
Egg Harbor City
Mullica
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Bridgeton
Hopewell
Shiloh
Greenwich
Stow Creek
Lower Alloways Cr
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Elsinboro
Salem
Pennsboro
Mannington
Piles Grove
Woodston
Carneys Point
Pennsgrove
Oldmans
Logan
Woolwich
Swedesboro
South Harrison
Mantua
East Greenwich
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Paulsboro
West Deptford
National Park
Woodbury
Woodbury Heights
Deptford
Wenonah
Westville
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Folsom
Buena Vista
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Pittsgrove
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Clayton
Glassboro
Harrison
Franklin
Newfield
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Winslow
Waterford
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Washington
Gloucester T
Pine Hill
Pine Valley
Clementon
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Laurel Springs
Stratford
Hi-Nella
Somerdale
Magnolia
Runnemeade
Bellmawr
Barrington
Lawnside
Tavistock
Haddon Hts
Haddonfield
+3625

Camden
Collingswood
Woodlynne
Gloucester City
Haddon T
Oaklyn
Audubon Park
Audubon
Mt Ephraim
Brooklawn
Merchantville
Pennsauken
Palmyra
Riverton
Cinnaminson
Delran
+1836

Cherry Hill
Voorhees
Gibbsboro
Berlin B
Berlin T
Maple Shade
Mt Laurel
Evesham
+2131

Riverside
Delanco
Edgewater Park
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Netcong
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26 Long Hill
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Roseland
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Caldwell
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East Hanover
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Cedar Grove
North Caldwell
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Irvington
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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE NEW JERSEY APPORTIONMENT COMMISSION  
Thursday, March 10

Members of the New Jersey Apportionment Commission:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on your ongoing efforts to produce a proposal that will fairly represent New Jersey residents. The New Jersey Working Families Alliance was founded in 2007 by groups representing workers, nurses, environmentalists, retirees, consumers, parents and ordinary citizens who were tired of unaccountable government. The work of this commission can go a long way to improving the accountability of elected officials and ensuring the voices of New Jersey’s residents are most fairly represented and heard on critical issues such as the state budget, health care, education and the environment.

Throughout the public hearings of this commission, individuals have called for a transparent and open process. Numerous individuals also called for meetings to be held after the 11th member was appointed. I applaud your efforts at offering New Jersey residents a real voice in how they will be represented for the next decade.

Additionally, I applaud the creation of the centralized website, www.apportionmentcommission.org. This website, and the posting of hearing transcripts, helps truly shine the light on this process. The commission can further increase public participation and transparency by posting any maps or proposals offered by any party on the central website and by allowing public comments on these maps. Those comments should become part of the official record.

Most importantly, though, is that the commission arrive at a map that meets the constitutional requirement of one person, one vote. New Jersey’s map must be drawn on an equal population basis. Already certain voices are calling for diluting the representation of voters in areas of the state with low voter turnouts, an outcome that would be immoral, unjust, and unconstitutional. Any map produced by this commission must safeguard the bedrock constitutional right to representation by
giving equal weight to all of New Jersey's residents – regardless of race or ethnic background, income, or place of residence.

The New Jersey constitution states that apportionment should be based on all inhabitants of the state. Any proposal that privileges past voter turnout ignores this principle. All too often, those who feel least represented by the existing political system fail to engage in our electoral system. Decreasing their voice through the redistricting process only encourages further disengagement, with its resulting negative impact on those communities.

I urge you to draw a map that meets all constitutional principles and uses the longstanding fairness standards used to measure one person, one vote. Protecting this core principle is vital to ensuring all New Jerseyans are fairly and adequately represented.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify here today.

Presented by:

Bill Holland
Executive Director
New Jersey Working Families Alliance
30 Clinton St. 3rd Floor
Newark, NJ 07102