



Asian American Community Coalition on Redistricting and Democracy | accord.newyork@gmail.com | 718-460-5600

**Statement by the
Asian American Community Coalition on Redistricting and Democracy to the
New York City 2012-2013 Districting Commission
for the Manhattan Borough's 3rd Round Public Hearing
Delivered by James Hong**

January 7, 2013
Hunter College Auditorium
695 Park Avenue New York, NY 10065

Good evening members and staff of the Districting Commission, Chairman Romano, citizens and residents of Manhattan. My name is James Hong, I am the Civic Participation Coordinator at the MinKwon Center for Community Action, and today I speak on behalf of ACCORD, the Asian American Community Coalition on Redistricting and Democracy. ACCORD has always believed it is in the interests of our city to have a round of hearings after a substantive draft.

We believe the Commission has a wonderful opportunity in this third round to hear the public's concerns over the December 4th draft. ACCORD had advocated for this kind of opportunity, and our sincere hope is that we will all work for the good of New York's residents and put aside our allegiances so the next revision will truly reflect a diverse and changing New York City.

Our coalition continues to support a district in lower Manhattan that recognizes a community of interest in the Chinatown and Lower East Side. Chinatown itself is kept together in the 1st district, and this should not change. But we have heard from numerous individuals and groups that the commonalities and shared interests between Chinatown and the Lower East Side are far more compelling than those shared between Chinatown and Battery Park City or the Financial District, which is the current configuration, and one that is preserved in the December 4th Revised Map from the Commission.

I'd like to reiterate that ACCORD's aim is not to elect, nor support, or even oppose, any candidate or elected official. Our singular purpose is to advocate for district maps that will keep together communities of interest, and prevent Asian Americans and racial minorities from being disenfranchised.

This being said, we believe the Commission's very aim of being independent is compromised when the voices of sitting elected officials have influence on the outcomes of redistricting. From a strictly legal perspective, it is safe to do so given that incumbent protection has been ruled a "lawful" aim of redistricting. But it is no way mandated. We believe our city's charter actually calls for a higher standard when it states that communities of interest should be recognized by the Districting Commission.

And so we urge the Commission to aim higher. Just because something may be legal, does not mean it is right. And this goes not only for Lower Manhattan, but for every borough and every neighborhood.

We also urge the Commission to have more transparency, and not to repeat the process taken on November 15th of last year, when the Commission revealed, then voted on the district plan within minutes – all within the same meeting. Literally no one in the public outside of the individuals at the meeting of the Commissioners had a chance to see how New York City would be divided for the next decade. We believe that the public should know what is going to be voted on by this Commission, as well as have a forum in which the Commissioners can hear what impact their map will have. There must be time for the public to digest, and then to respond to the map, even if it is at the meeting of the Commissioners, and even if the Commission will not necessarily revise the map based on that forum, and will vote on the map as introduced.

ACCORD's members include the following organizations: Asian American Bar Association of New York, Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, Asian Pacific Americans for Progress New York, Chhaya CDC, Chinese Progressive Association, Indo-Caribbean Alliance, Korean Americans for Political Advancement, Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York, MinKwon Center for Community Action, OCA-NY, Taking Our Seat, United Chinese Association of Brooklyn, YWCA of Queens and Dr. Carol Huang of Queens, New York.