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THE COUNCIL OF  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

**MELISSA MARK-VIVERITO**

COUNCIL MEMBER, 8<sup>TH</sup> DISTRICT

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January 30, 2013

**VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL**

Mr. Benito Romano  
Chair  
New York City Districting Commission  
253 Broadway, 7<sup>th</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 10007

Dear Chair Romano:

I am writing about the redrawing of the 8<sup>th</sup> District lines. In a recent meeting with Executive Director Carl Hum and other staff and at the last public meeting held on January 23, 2012, it was indicated that the staff would evaluate reinstating Mount Sinai, Randall's and Wards Islands and the remaining parts of Lexington and Carver Houses to District 8. This is greatly encouraging and I thank the Commission and staff for hearing the clear testimony delivered by residents of my community at the January 7<sup>th</sup> Manhattan hearing. However, I remain concerned about the impact of restoring these critically important areas so long as the Commission maintains a rigid mandate that the 8<sup>th</sup> District must be at least 50% in the Bronx. I would strongly urge the Commission to demonstrate flexibility in this regard and look closely at a map I am submitting that restores the areas consistently mentioned in the testimony, while still maintaining substantial growth in the Bronx. As demonstrated by this proposal, these blocks should be added back in to East Harlem without subtracting additional Manhattan population from other areas. I also urge the Commission to reject the proposal to remove Central Park from the 8<sup>th</sup> District, which is important parkland that should not be taken away from a primarily working class and low-income district.

I still maintain that the full District 8 lines in El Barrio/East Harlem should be restored to protect this historic community of interest. East 96<sup>th</sup> Street is a critical gateway which is in Community Board 11's boundaries. Additionally, the Western boundaries along Park, Madison and Fifth have reflected where high concentrations of Latinos still reside. However, I recognize the Commission's desire to greatly expand District 8's coverage of the Bronx and that as a result, some portions of El Barrio/East Harlem will have to be removed from the district.

In response to the clear testimony we heard at the January 7<sup>th</sup> hearing, I have developed a proposed map that I believe offers a way forward with regards to the configuration of District 8. This proposal addresses many of the items that were included in the charge to Commission staff given at the January 23<sup>rd</sup> meeting, as well as other concerns raised in correspondence and meetings between the Commission and my office. My proposed map:

- **Reunites Lexington Houses and Carver Houses.** The Commission has expressed that all efforts should be made to keep NYCHA housing developments united in one district. These two developments have historically been represented in the 8<sup>th</sup> District and identify strongly as part of the El Barrio/East Harlem community. District 8 has the highest concentration of public housing in the City of New York; therefore, it only makes sense to include the entirety of these two developments in a district that is so heavily-populated with NYCHA housing.
- **Restores Mount Sinai Hospital.** This hospital, like the city's Metropolitan Hospital, provides critical services as well as employment opportunities for so many El Barrio/East Harlem residents. As you heard loud and clear at the hearing, Mount Sinai is an important landmark in the community and should remain in the 8<sup>th</sup> District.
- **Restores Randall's Island.** Clearly, for low-income communities that suffer disproportionately from obesity and related health concerns, accessible parkland and recreational opportunities are absolutely critical. As you know, the concerns around the proposal to move Randall's and Wards Islands to District 22 in Queens were among the most cited at the Manhattan hearing. Randall's Island is an important source of open space in El Barrio/East Harlem and the community has worked tirelessly to provide even greater access to this incredible resource. Similarly, the South Bronx community has been doing the same, and will soon have a new and more direct Randall's Island Connector. Randall's and Wards Island should remain in District 8; **however, adding the 1,658 residents counted on Wards Island (most of which correspond to shelter beds) back to District 8 should not lead to any additional population being removed from El Barrio/East Harlem.** If this is absolutely not practicable, it should be moved to a Bronx district, such as District 17, which is still more connected to the island than Queens, and shares similar goals and priorities regarding access to this vital parkland for low-income communities.
- **Preserves Central Park.** Similarly, Central Park is another critical source of open space for the El Barrio/East Harlem community. It has historically been part of District 8 and I believe strongly that it should remain so. In giving Central Park over to a higher-income district, I believe that the Commission would be sending the wrong message about how vital parkland is to a community like El Barrio/East Harlem.

- **Restores Other Blocks with High Hispanic Concentration.** There were several blocks outside of those most frequently mentioned at the hearings that also have a large Hispanic population, and should remain in District 8, which remains an ability-to-elect district for the Latino community.<sup>1</sup> These areas have a collective Hispanic population of 56.7%.
- **Achieves a Large Hispanic Population.** Correspondence between the Commission and my office has identified a 65% target threshold for the Hispanic population in District 8 in order to ensure that Latinos have the ability to elect a candidate of their choice. My proposal falls just short of that threshold at 64.4% Hispanic, just 0.3% below the Commission’s December 4<sup>th</sup> Plan for District 8. Further, the Hispanic voting age population under my proposal is almost equal to that of the December 4<sup>th</sup> Plan at 63.2%. I believe this configuration should fully address Voting Rights Act concerns; however, if these concerns remain, I would ask that my proposal be reviewed by Dr. Lisa Handley and that a detailed analysis be provided that demonstrates whether this configuration would compromise the district’s “ability to elect” status.
- **Grows the Bronx Portion of District 8 to 45%.** I have consistently said throughout this process that my community and I have absolutely no objection to welcoming a substantially larger portion of the Bronx into District 8, but that it should not come at the expense of the historic community of interest of El Barrio/East Harlem. In maintaining the most critical areas of East Harlem and accepting the maximum possible population deviation, we have been able to arrive at a 55%/45% split between the boroughs. While this ratio falls short of the 50% Bronx threshold requested by the Commission, that mandate is overly rigid and does not allow for the consideration of the realities of the El Barrio/East Harlem boundaries. I believe strongly that the configuration between the two boroughs is a reasonable one that affords the Bronx more representation while respecting the historic boundaries of El Barrio/East Harlem.
- **Includes a Focus on the South Bronx Waterfront.** A local organization in my district, South Bronx Unite, presented a “South Bronx Common Sense” plan at the January 9<sup>th</sup> public hearing that includes the consideration of including the South Bronx waterfront in a single district due to the work that community groups are engaging in to expand access to the waterfront. My proposal seeks to unite the waterfront in the 8<sup>th</sup> District.
- **Restores Yankee Stadium to a Bronx-Only District.** Several Bronx residents testified at the January 9<sup>th</sup> Bronx hearing regarding the placement of Yankee Stadium in District 8. The map I have submitted places this landmark into the 16<sup>th</sup> District, which is fully encapsulated in the Bronx.

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<sup>1</sup> These blocks are: 111<sup>th</sup> to 112<sup>th</sup> and 115<sup>th</sup> to 117<sup>th</sup> Streets between Fifth and Madison Avenues; as well as 118<sup>th</sup> to 119<sup>th</sup> and 123<sup>rd</sup> to 124<sup>th</sup> Streets between Park and Lexington Avenues.

This proposal does not achieve everything I would like for my community. It stands at the maximum possible deviation, which will surely create additional challenges for any representative serving a two-borough district with an already high concentration of poverty. It also still removes 13 blocks from the current El Barrio/East Harlem boundaries. On the Bronx side, the configuration leaves out critical landmarks and institutions that could benefit the district and provide an economic base, including not only Yankee Stadium, but also Hostos Community College and Lincoln Hospital. Still, I believe this responds to the majority of the community's feedback and I ask that you strongly consider it. In the event that elements of this proposal cannot be accommodated, I would respectfully ask for a written response detailing the rationale.

I would like to thank the Commission for hearing the clear testimony from the El Barrio/East Harlem and Mott Haven communities regarding the future of District 8. I would also like to acknowledge the Commission for exploring ways to reunite Manhattan Valley. While unfortunately District 8 will no longer include Manhattan Valley, it is encouraging that efforts are being made to unite this historic community into a single district.

I look forward to continued dialogue in the coming days regarding the configuration of the 8<sup>th</sup> District.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Melissa Mark-Viverito', written in a cursive style.

Melissa Mark-Viverito  
Council Member, District 8

Cc: Carl Hum, Executive Director  
Thaddeus Hackworth, General Counsel