



CITIZENS UNION OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Testimony to the City Districting Commission, Brooklyn Public Hearing
January 10, 2012

Good evening, Chair Romano and other members of the City Districting Commission. My name is Rachael Fauss, and I am the Policy and Research Manager of Citizens Union, a nonpartisan good government group dedicated to making democracy work for all New Yorkers. I am focusing my remarks on Brooklyn tonight, given Citizens Union's previous testimony in Manhattan and the Bronx.

We applaud the Commission for rightly removing Assemblymember Vito Lopez's home residence from proposed District 34 following the revelation that this change was likely made for political reasons and without a public airing. We would also like to acknowledge the Commission's efforts to keep neighborhoods whole, including keeping the Russian community together in Manhattan Beach and Sheepshead Bay, and uniting Canarsie to create District 46 as an opportunity to elect district. In spite of these changes, however, there are a number of other concerns that need to be addressed.

Chief among the remaining issues is the need for the Commission to reconsider its stance of using incumbency as a driving criterion for the drawing of lines, particularly as it relates to Bensonhurst. The Asian American community in Bensonhurst is split into 4 districts – Districts 38, 43, 44 and 47. The Asian American population has grown by more 50 percent in Districts 38, 43 and 47, for a total increase of nearly 50,000 residents across the four districts. We are particularly concerned that the Commission cited incumbency as a consideration in the decision to not create an Asian American influence district. Given the large population growth, creation of an Asian influence district may be more desirable to the public, and we urge you to reconsider your decision to leave the districts largely the same and to fully explain your final decision. We believe that it is possible to ensure continued representation of neighboring protected groups, as has been demonstrated by the Unity Map.

Regarding the proposed map for District 33, the Orthodox Jewish Communities in Bed-Stuy and Williamsburg would be joined, District 39 would now include all of Park Slope, and neighboring District 35 would remain as a majority African American District. We recognize that preserving voting rights and creating districts that keep neighborhoods and communities intact are laudable goals consistent with the City Charter. At the same time, concerns have been raised about the potential competitiveness of District 33, and about the removal of the northern portion of Bed-Stuy from District 35, as it would split Community Board 3 and the 79th Police Precinct between these districts. Additionally, some community members from this area have voiced the desire that have two separate councilmembers representing them. While Citizens Union does not have a specific recommendation for this district, as with other districts, members of the public have not been provided with a full, written rationale for the drawing of District 33, and therefore how the Commission addressed these competing goals has not been fully documented for the public. We recommend that the Commission address via a formal written analysis in advance of a final vote on the maps the various considerations in drawing this district to address any public concerns regarding the district.

The public release of written rationales for the drawing of districts is essential prior to any vote of the Commission, for District 33 and all other districts. We strongly recommend you to provide this information to ensure that the public is aware of the Commission's full considerations in drawing districts.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.