

January 10, 2013

Dear Members of the NYC Council Districting Commission,

My name is Mike Nelson, Member of the New York City Council since February 1999 representing the 48<sup>th</sup> Council District.

I submit this testimony to strongly urge this Commission to accept the **preliminary** draft map that was designed by the commission.

During my terms in office, the 48<sup>th</sup> district has embodied New York City's diversity, with countless different ethnic and religious communities living and doing business within our borders. These groups include individuals of varying income levels, native-born Americans as well as members of diverse immigrant communities from the former Soviet Union, China, Pakistan, Turkey, Mexico and many other places around the world. Furthermore our district is home to the largest concentration of senior citizens in the City.

Diversity is not only something members of the 48<sup>th</sup> district embrace but is also absolutely necessary to ensure the fairness of our government. Upon being elected to the City Council, I immediately recognized how essential it was that my staff and I establish a relationship with each different community in the district so that everyone's needs could be met. I fear that with the newly proposed lines, which were drawn only to serve the interests of the Russian-American community, according to the express words of the districting commission, true equality would vanish.

In recent years the Russian-American community has achieved great success in many areas of American life including politics, which I truly commend. Members of the Russian-American community who have achieved electoral success in the existing 48<sup>th</sup> Council District include NYS Senator David Storobin, NYS Assemblyman Alec Brook-Krasny, and two Democratic District Leaders. These electoral victories occurred in districts where **RUSSIAN AMERICANS DID NOT CONSTITUTE A MAJORITY AND THE CANDIDATES WERE REQUIRED TO SUCCEED BASED ON MERIT.** Therefore, I was shocked to learn that members of the Russian-American community had submitted testimony to the districting commission asking that the district lines be artificially re-drawn to give them an unfair population advantage for future elections. The Russian-American plan to make the 48<sup>th</sup> Council District skewed in their favor **would completely disenfranchise all other racial, religious, ethnic and immigrant groups, rendering their votes meaningless.** Basically what the Russian-Americans are asserting is that since they have already elected Russian-Americans to **ALL** local offices except that of the Council, they are somehow deserving of special treatment at the expense of everyone else.

Moreover, a "Super Russian District" will be a **DISASTER** for the entire Russian-American community and will set back all of their electoral gains of recent years. Not only would a super-Russian District hurt the multicultural groups within the 48<sup>th</sup> district, but it would also negatively impact the remaining Russian-Americans in the 47<sup>th</sup> district, whose voices would shrink in the process. These facts have been asserted by many of my

Russian-American constituents who are reluctant to testify here for fear of being shunned should the commission's final plan be implemented -- which I trust will not happen.

I stand before you today representing each and every group in the 48<sup>th</sup> council district equally, as I have always done. Let us preserve the American ideal that as diverse as our cultures may be, we have all passed Lady Liberty arriving at our shores with the same American Dream. The 48<sup>th</sup> Council District is a microcosm of that dream. Please preserve our district for all of our residents by adopting the Preliminary Draft Plan.

Sincerely,  
Michael C. Nelson

January 10, 2013

Dear Members of the NYC Council Districting Commission,

My name is Brandee Weiss, and I am a lifelong resident of the 48<sup>th</sup> Council District. I am a native-born American, and I am proud to say that my paternal grandparents, both **Russian-language speaking immigrants**, not only have resided in Brighton Beach, but for more than 40 years they also owned and operated the well-known establishment, "Israel's Take Home Food" on Brighton Beach Avenue.

I submit this testimony for the January 10<sup>th</sup> Brooklyn Districting Commission hearing to strongly urge this Commission to accept the preliminary draft map that was designed by the districting commission, and which is fully supported by Councilman Michael C. Nelson, who has represented the 48<sup>th</sup> Council District since 1999.

For many years, the 48<sup>th</sup> district has embodied New York City's diversity, with countless different ethnic and religious communities living and doing business within our borders. These groups include individuals of varying income levels, native-born Americans as well as members of diverse immigrant communities from the former Soviet Union, China, Pakistan, Turkey, Mexico and many other places around the world. Furthermore our district is home to the largest concentration of senior citizens in the City. In short, we are no strangers to new cultures.

Diversity is not only something members of the 48<sup>th</sup> district embrace but is also absolutely necessary to ensure the fairness of our government. For the past 10 years, no single community has had an overwhelming population advantage, allowing for the needs of the entire district to be heard. I fear that with the newly proposed lines, which were drawn only to serve the interest of the Russian-American community, according to the express words of the districting commission, true equality would disappear.

At the October 11<sup>th</sup> commission hearing, the Russian-American representatives attempted to make the argument that the preliminary lines for the 48<sup>th</sup> district, which removed Manhattan Beach and added parts of Midwood, "diluted" their voice and gave "no real opportunity" for Russian-Americans to win an election in the district. This claim is a great overstatement as both Manhattan Beach and Midwood are home to equally modest Russian-American communities. They also make this claim of dilution, despite the fact NY State Senator David Storobin, Assemblyman Alec Brook-Krasny, and Democratic District Leaders Ari Kagan and Mark Davidovich are all Russian-Americans with electoral success stories in the existing 48<sup>th</sup> Council District.

Their solution was not simply to reclaim Manhattan Beach for the 48<sup>th</sup> district but to completely transform the multi-cultural flavor of the 48<sup>th</sup> district by creating a Super-Russian district. This was achieved first by petitioning for, and then being granted their request to add predominantly Russian-American buildings along Sea-Breeze Breeze Avenue and on the West Side of Ocean Parkway.

While the Russian-Americans continue to argue that adding buildings along Sea-Breeze Avenue and on the West Side of Ocean Parkway is "fair and just" for their community, they completely ignore what is "fair and just" for everyone else. At 25%, a number used by Ari Kagan that is probably much higher, Russian-Americans already make up the largest plurality of any one group in the 48<sup>th</sup> district, are sufficiently represented and also have the greatest opportunity of any ethnic base to elect one of their

own. Any shifts favoring the comparatively large Russian-American community, is a shift away from everyone else in this highly diverse district.

Let me be clear. I would have **no problem whatsoever** if a Russian-American were elected to the City Council. Still, any and all elected officials should be elected based on merit, and not just because the election was guaranteed by the numerical superiority of a particular group. And while I understand how eager their community is to elect a 1<sup>st</sup> Russian-American Councilmember, they should not be given this unreasonable and unjustified special treatment at the expense of everyone else.

On the national level, gerrymandering occurs when districts are drawn to minimize an opposition political party's voice. On the local level, it looks like the same is happening only with ethnicity as the catalyst. What is the real purpose of making a super-Russian district, or any super-ethnic district for that matter anyway? We must do whatever it takes to keep our districts as diverse as possible to ensure parity and fairness in our elections. Therefore I strongly urge this commission to accept the preliminary draft map that was submitted. Rather than heed the advice of the few that try to high tail their way to power, I hope the Commission sees the importance of diversity not only in the 48<sup>th</sup> district but also in the most diverse City in the world. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Brandee Weiss

January 10, 2013

Dear Members of the NYC Council Districting Commission,

My name is Laura Weiss, and I am a lifelong resident of the 48<sup>th</sup> Council District. I am a native-born American, and I am proud to say that my paternal grandparents, both **Russian-language speaking immigrants**, not only have resided in Brighton Beach, but for more than 40 years they also owned and operated the well-known establishment, “Israel’s Take Home Food” on Brighton Beach Avenue.

I submit this testimony for the January 10<sup>th</sup> Brooklyn Districting Commission hearing to strongly urge this Commission to accept the preliminary draft map that was designed by the districting commission, and which is fully supported by Councilman Michael C. Nelson, who has represented the 48<sup>th</sup> Council District since 1999.

For many years, the 48<sup>th</sup> district has embodied New York City’s diversity, with countless different ethnic and religious communities living and doing business within our borders. These groups include individuals of varying income levels, native-born Americans as well as members of diverse immigrant communities from the former Soviet Union, China, Pakistan, Turkey, Mexico and many other places around the world. Furthermore our district is home to the largest concentration of senior citizens in the City. In short, we are no strangers to new cultures.

Diversity is not only something members of the 48<sup>th</sup> district embrace but is also absolutely necessary to ensure the fairness of our government. For the past 10 years, no single community has had an overwhelming population advantage, allowing for the needs of the entire district to be heard. I fear that with the newly proposed lines, which were drawn only to serve the interest of the Russian-American community, according to the express words of the districting commission, true equality would disappear.

At the October 11<sup>th</sup> commission hearing, the Russian-American representatives attempted to make the argument that the preliminary lines for the 48<sup>th</sup> district, which removed Manhattan Beach and added parts of Midwood, “diluted” their voice and gave “no real opportunity” for Russian-Americans to win an election in the district. This claim is a great overstatement as both Manhattan Beach and Midwood are home to equally modest Russian-American communities. They also make this claim of dilution, despite the fact NY State Senator David Storobin, Assemblyman Alec Brook-Krasny, and Democratic District Leaders Ari Kagan and Mark Davidovich are all Russian-Americans with electoral success stories in the existing 48<sup>th</sup> Council District.

Their solution was not simply to reclaim Manhattan Beach for the 48<sup>th</sup> district but to completely transform the multi-cultural flavor of the 48<sup>th</sup> district by creating a Super-Russian district. This was achieved first by petitioning for, and then being granted their request to add predominantly Russian-American buildings along Sea-Breeze Breeze Avenue and on the West Side of Ocean Parkway.

While the Russian-Americans continue to argue that adding buildings along Sea-Breeze Avenue and on the West Side of Ocean Parkway is “fair and just” for their community, they completely ignore what is “fair and just” for everyone else. At 25%, a number used by Ari Kagan that is probably much higher, Russian-Americans already make up the largest plurality of any one group in the 48<sup>th</sup> district, are sufficiently represented and also have the greatest opportunity of any ethnic base to elect one of their

own. Any shifts favoring the comparatively large Russian-American community, is a shift away from everyone else in this highly diverse district.

Let me be clear. I would have **no problem whatsoever** if a Russian-American were elected to the City Council. Still, any and all elected officials should be elected based on merit, and not just because the election was guaranteed by the numerical superiority of a particular group. And while I understand how eager their community is to elect a 1<sup>st</sup> Russian-American Councilmember, they should not be given this unreasonable and unjustified special treatment at the expense of everyone else.

On the national level, gerrymandering occurs when districts are drawn to minimize an opposition political party's voice. On the local level, it looks like the same is happening only with ethnicity as the catalyst. What is the real purpose of making a super-Russian district, or any super-ethnic district for that matter anyway? We must do whatever it takes to keep our districts as diverse as possible to ensure parity and fairness in our elections. Therefore I strongly urge this commission to accept the preliminary draft map that was submitted. Rather than heed the advice of the few that try to high tail their way to power, I hope the Commission sees the importance of diversity not only in the 48<sup>th</sup> district but also in the most diverse City in the world. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Laura Weiss

January 10, 2013

Dear Members of the NYC Council Districting Commission,

My name is Rosalind Weiss, and I am a lifelong resident of the 48<sup>th</sup> Council District. I am a native-born American, and I am proud to say that my paternal grandparents, both **Russian-language speaking immigrants**, not only have resided in Brighton Beach, but for more than 40 years they also owned and operated the well-known establishment, "Israel's Take Home Food" on Brighton Beach Avenue.

I submit this testimony for the January 10<sup>th</sup> Brooklyn Districting Commission hearing to strongly urge this Commission to accept the preliminary draft map that was designed by the districting commission, and which is fully supported by Councilman Michael C. Nelson, who has represented the 48<sup>th</sup> Council District since 1999.

For many years, the 48<sup>th</sup> district has embodied New York City's diversity, with countless different ethnic and religious communities living and doing business within our borders. These groups include individuals of varying income levels, native-born Americans as well as members of diverse immigrant communities from the former Soviet Union, China, Pakistan, Turkey, Mexico and many other places around the world. Furthermore our district is home to the largest concentration of senior citizens in the City. In short, we are no strangers to new cultures.

Diversity is not only something members of the 48<sup>th</sup> district embrace but is also absolutely necessary to ensure the fairness of our government. For the past 10 years, no single community has had an overwhelming population advantage, allowing for the needs of the entire district to be heard. I fear that with the newly proposed lines, which were drawn only to serve the interest of the Russian-American community, according to the express words of the districting commission, true equality would disappear.

At the October 11<sup>th</sup> commission hearing, the Russian-American representatives attempted to make the argument that the preliminary lines for the 48<sup>th</sup> district, which removed Manhattan Beach and added parts of Midwood, "diluted" their voice and gave "no real opportunity" for Russian-Americans to win an election in the district. This claim is a great overstatement as both Manhattan Beach and Midwood are home to equally modest Russian-American communities. They also make this claim of dilution, despite the fact NY State Senator David Storobin, Assemblyman Alec Brook-Krasny, and Democratic District Leaders Ari Kagan and Mark Davidovich are all Russian-Americans with electoral success stories in the existing 48<sup>th</sup> Council District.

Their solution was not simply to reclaim Manhattan Beach for the 48<sup>th</sup> district but to completely transform the multi-cultural flavor of the 48<sup>th</sup> district by creating a Super-Russian district. This was achieved first by petitioning for, and then being granted their request to add predominantly Russian-American buildings along Sea-Breeze Breeze Avenue and on the West Side of Ocean Parkway.

While the Russian-Americans continue to argue that adding buildings along Sea-Breeze Avenue and on the West Side of Ocean Parkway is "fair and just" for their community, they completely ignore what is "fair and just" for everyone else. At 25%, a number used by Ari Kagan that is probably much higher, Russian-Americans already make up the largest plurality of any one group in the 48<sup>th</sup> district, are sufficiently represented and also have the greatest opportunity of any ethnic base to elect one of their

own. Any shifts favoring the comparatively large Russian-American community, is a shift away from everyone else in this highly diverse district.

Let me be clear. I would have **no problem whatsoever** if a Russian-American were elected to the City Council. Still, any and all elected officials should be elected based on merit, and not just because the election was guaranteed by the numerical superiority of a particular group. And while I understand how eager their community is to elect a 1<sup>st</sup> Russian-American Councilmember, they should not be given this unreasonable and unjustified special treatment at the expense of everyone else.

On the national level, gerrymandering occurs when districts are drawn to minimize an opposition political party's voice. On the local level, it looks like the same is happening only with ethnicity as the catalyst. What is the real purpose of making a super-Russian district, or any super-ethnic district for that matter anyway? We must do whatever it takes to keep our districts as diverse as possible to ensure parity and fairness in our elections. Therefore I strongly urge this commission to accept the preliminary draft map that was submitted. Rather than heed the advice of the few that try to high tail their way to power, I hope the Commission sees the importance of diversity not only in the 48<sup>th</sup> district but also in the most diverse City in the world. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Rosalind Weiss



January 9, 2013

Dear Members of the NYC Council Districting Commission,

My name is Raisa Chernina and I am an American citizen, living here for 34 years. The phrase “American Citizen” is prominently displayed on my passport, and I am extremely proud of this! I am a resident of Sheepshead Bay, am a member of Community Board 15, and am the Founder and Executive Director of the Be Proud Foundation. The Be Proud Foundation is a non-partisan, non-for-profit organization representing thousands of Russian-speaking individuals. Since its inception in 2003, the goal of the Be Proud Foundation has been to strengthen cultural and community ties and encourage civic participation amongst our members. Ranging from “Russian-American Heritage & Culture Day Celebration” held at City Hall, to “Celebrating Lives Events” on behalf of children suffering from leukemia, to “Toys for Tots” an endeavor aimed at raising donations and gifts for children from underprivileged families, and “Russian Night” bringing families together from local Russian cultural centers and other immigrant communities, we have helped to empower Russian-Americans to become more integrated in American life.

There are more than 350,000 Russian Americans in all five boroughs with Brooklyn being home to the largest Russian-speaking community in the United States.

I submit this testimony for the January 10<sup>th</sup> Brooklyn Districting Commission hearing to strongly urge this Commission to accept the preliminary draft map that was designed by the districting commission, and which is fully supported by Councilman Michael Nelson, who has represented the 48<sup>th</sup> Council District since 1999.

For many years, the 48<sup>th</sup> district has embodied New York City’s diversity, with countless different ethnic and religious communities living and doing business within its borders. Furthermore, the 48<sup>th</sup> district is home to the largest concentration of senior citizens in the City. In short, we are no strangers to new cultures.

I strongly oppose the district lines proposed for the 48<sup>th</sup> Council District included in the December 4<sup>th</sup> Draft Plan. Presently in the 48<sup>th</sup> District, no one group has a greater voice than any other. We are all in a position of balance and equality. Constructing a super-Russian district would not only hurt the multi-cultural groups within the 48<sup>th</sup> district but it would also negatively impact the Russian-Americans in the 47<sup>th</sup> district, whose voices would shrink in the process. Russian-Americans who have embraced the American dream have achieved tremendous success in business, culture, sports, arts science, medicine and politics. We have in government, Assemblyman Alec Brook-Krasny, two Democratic District Leaders and a Republican District Leader. I am especially proud that Assemblyman Alec Brook-Krasny is the first Russian-language speaking individual elected to office – who, by the way, was elected in a district which included Bay Ridge with many Italian-Americans, despite the fact that Alec does NOT speak Italian.

Russian-Americans have flourished in the 48th district due in no small part to its diversity. For the past 12 years, the current Councilman has gone above and beyond to make sure the special needs of EVERY group in the community has been generously met. So long as the 48th Council district is comprised of a variety of ethnic, religious and racial groups, we are in the unique position of having equal access to our policy makers.

The Be Proud Foundation is honored to have been the moving force, along with Councilman Michael Nelson, in having a street in the 48th District named to honor the

Heroes of Operation Iraqi Freedom. These heroes are from all ethnic backgrounds and walks of life. They bravely fought for America because they are AMERICANS. Some were killed not because of the language they spoke, but because of country they came from. **THEY WERE KILLED BECAUSE THEY WERE AMERICANS!**

**The suggestion of creating a super-Russian district by adding buildings along Sea-Breeze Avenue and on the West Side of Ocean Parkway to the 48<sup>th</sup> district will severely diminish motivated, worthy Americans from seeking office here. It will guarantee only one thing – that a Russian-American will be elected to the Council in the 48<sup>th</sup> district, even if that person is unworthy of that office.**

No group in the 48<sup>th</sup> Council District should be disenfranchised. We, as Americans should all have a fair and equal opportunity, so that only the best succeed. Anything less is an insult to the guarantees made under the equal protection clause of the United States Constitution. I urge you to adopt the Preliminary Draft Plan.

Sincerely,  
Raisa Chernina

January 10, 2013

Dear Members of the NYC Council Districting Commission,

My name is Shimon Rinkovsky. I am a resident of the 48<sup>th</sup> Council District, am an active member of the Russian-American community in Brighton Beach, was the founder of the "Save Brighton Beach" movement that led to the withdrawal of the City's proposed rezoning plan, and am a member of Community Board 13. I have served as a liaison between my community and elected officials for the past 6 years.

I submit this testimony for consideration by the Districting Commission at the January 10<sup>th</sup> Brooklyn Districting Commission hearing to strongly urge this Commission to accept the preliminary draft map that was designed by the districting commission, and which is fully supported by Councilman Michael C. Nelson, who has represented the 48<sup>th</sup> Council District since 1999.

For many years, the 48<sup>th</sup> district has embodied New York City's diversity, with countless different ethnic and religious communities living and doing business within our borders. These groups include individuals of varying income levels, native-born Americans as well as members of diverse immigrant communities from the former Soviet Union, China, Pakistan, Turkey, Mexico and many other places around the world. Furthermore our district is home to the largest concentration of senior citizens in the City. In short, we are no strangers to new cultures.

I strongly oppose the district lines proposed for the 48<sup>th</sup> Council District included in the December 4<sup>th</sup> Draft Plan. The adoption of this plan would be a terrible step backwards for the Russian-American Community and would undermine much of the great progress in the political process which my community has achieved in a relatively short time period. The fundamental defect in the December 4<sup>th</sup> plan is that by concentrating most of the Russian-American voters in a single district -- the proposed 48<sup>th</sup> -- **by adding buildings along Sea- Breeze Avenue and on the West Side of Ocean Parkway seriously diminishes the overall influence of the Russian-American community** for no good reasons. While the few members of the community in the "inner circle" assured that one of their own will be elected to the Council, will reap the benefits, the overwhelming majority of my community will be left out in the cold. Members of my community will not be alone in being disenfranchised from a political process which is no longer responsive to our needs, but in addition many of the remaining groups in the newly constructed 48<sup>th</sup> District who formerly constituted an important presence in the political process will also be reduced to an insignificant minority easily to be ignored.

I would strongly urge that what is in the best interest of **ALL THE MEMBERS OF THE RUSSIAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY** is that as many districts as possible be created with a significant Russian American presence. Specifically, in Southern Brooklyn the large Russian-American population west of Ocean Parkway presently in the 47<sup>th</sup> Council District should **NOT BE COMBINED** with the Russian-American Community in the existing 48<sup>th</sup> District. It is much more important for **ALL THE MEMBERS OF MY COMMUNITY** that we have influence in as many Districts as possible rather than to have 1 Council Member of Russian-American descent among the 51 Council Members.

Russian-Americans have flourished in the 48<sup>th</sup> district due in no small part to its diversity. For the past 12 years, the current Councilmember has gone above and beyond to make sure the special needs of every group in my community has been generously met. This is not in spite of the multi-cultural composition of the 48<sup>th</sup> Council District –

but because of it. So long as the 48<sup>th</sup> Council district is comprised of a variety of ethnic, religious and racial groups, we, as a community not only work together to address our common needs and diverse goals – but we are also in the unique position of having equal access to our policy makers. No one group has a greater voice than any other, and so we are all in a position of balance and equality. Consequently as selfish as I could be to support a super-Russian district, it would, for no compelling reason, hurt the multi-cultural groups within the 48<sup>th</sup> district and also negatively impact the Russian-Americans in the 47<sup>th</sup> district, whose voices would shrink in the process.

Those members of my community who have submitted testimony in support of the December 4<sup>th</sup> plan recognize the tremendous accomplishments of the Russian American Community. As was stated by Dmitry Margulis in testimony submitted for this January 10<sup>th</sup> Hearing and reiterated in the same or similar words by others in their testimony:

*“As you know, [the] Russian-American Community became an integral part of New York City. Our community flourished in our great city. Russian-speaking immigrants achieved tremendous success in business, culture, sports, arts science, medicine and **POLITICS (emphasis supplied)**,...We have in government: NYS Senator David Storobin, Assemblyman Alec Brook-Krasny, Democratic District Leaders Ari Kagan and Mark Davidovich, Republican District Leader Boris Pincus...”*

While I strongly agree with these sentiments, I STRONGLY DISAGREE with the conclusion that this is an argument in support of creating a district with enough Russian-Americans to insure the election of a Russian-American Council Member. We have already elected many Russian-Americans to public office. Ethnic pride no longer demands this. Having become an integral part of the electoral process, it is important that the redistricting process reflect this by maximizing our influence in as many Council Districts as possible by providing a significant Russian American presence in as many Districts as possible. Based on the success of other Russian-Americans seeking elective office in districts which had a significant number of Russian Americans, BUT LESS THAN A MAJORITY, it is likely that a Russian American will be elected to the Council in the near future. What is certain however is that all the members of the Russian-American community, as well as all members of all other groups will have a voice in government that will be heard by whoever is elected to the Council. I urge you to adopt the Preliminary Draft Plan.

Sincerely,  
Shimon Rinkovsky