



CITIZENS UNION OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Testimony to the City Districting Commission, Queens Public Hearing
January 14, 2012

Good evening, Chair Romano and other members of the City Districting Commission. My name is Bill Meehan, and I am a volunteer member of Citizens Union, a nonpartisan good government group dedicated to making democracy work for all New Yorkers. I am focusing my remarks on Queens, as other representatives of Citizens Union have previously testified at the Manhattan, Bronx and Brooklyn hearings.

I am a resident of Queens and deeply involved in its civic life: I serve as a member of Queens Community Board 3; I am on the board of the New Visions Democratic Club and a member of the Queens County Democratic Committee; I am a Board Member and Treasurer of the Jackson Heights-Elmhurst Kehillah; President of Chapter 991 of AARP based in Jackson Heights; Business Director of Queens Lesbian and Gay Pride Committee and a founding member of the Jackson Heights Dog Run. I cherish and respect the diversity that makes Queens a unique and wonderful place to live.

While Citizens Union recognizes that improvements were made in Queens to keep some neighborhoods together, including Elmhurst, Cambria Heights and Maspeth, there are additional neighborhoods that the Commission should again try to keep whole.

District 19 does not include all of Bayside or Oakland Gardens, as was requested by the majority of community members in public testimony, which would unite the Asian American community. There has been a 50 percent growth of Asian American Communities in both of these districts, and we recommend that the Commission fully include Bayside and Oakland Gardens in District 19. We recognize that community members have also noted that the residential neighborhood of Broadway-Flushing is now divided, which used to be wholly within District 19. We urge the Commission to seek to address both of these concerns and to publicly document its decision before it votes on final maps.

The South Asian community in Ozone Park and Cypress Hill is divided between Districts 37 and 32. While the Commission stated that it could not create another cross-over district between Queens and Brooklyn, as District 34 already does so, it may be possible to shift this crossover to another area. Testimony at several hearings indicated that the South Asian community has requested this change. We urge the Commission to examine whether shifting the crossover district to these districts is a feasible alternative.

For all of proposed council districts, Citizens Union recommends that the Commission provide to the public in advance of any vote on final maps a written rationale detailing its decision-making for each district. For example, the rationale should include how the Commission addressed requirements in the City Charter and specifically address how it handled public requests regarding their own districts. This information is essential to ensure that the public has more information about the choices that were made and potentially more confidence in the end result.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.