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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE DISTRICTING COMMISSION 8/16/12

I am speaking today as a former member of the City Council – when I represented not just one part of the area, but all of Greenwich Village. The Village used to be unified in one district, but for several years this distinct, well defined community has been gerrymandered into three districts. The result? On virtually every issue two parts of the Village do not have their elected Council Member speaking for them, as two of these three elected officials almost always defer to the third. Not only that, but in a recent vote, one of the Village Council Members actually implied that she was against a project, as were her very vocal constituents, but in deference to her colleague, she would vote “yes.” So much for representative government.

Greenwich Villagers had several big time issues facing them in the last few years – among them St. Vincent’s Hospital, NYU and Washington Square Park. In each case two out of the three electeds deferred, despite the fact that the loss of a hospital affected all Villagers – not just Speaker Quinn’s constituents; and despite the fact that people from all parts of the Village used the park – not just former Council Member Gerson’s constituents...and all Villagers will feel the impact of NYU’s expansion plans – not just Council Member’s Chin ‘s constituents.

Greenwich Village has very distinct and clear cut boundaries, as recognized by the City Planning Commission when it drew Community Board lines. But some past Districting Commissioner felt that since Fifth Avenue was the line demarking east and west in Manhattan, it should also be used, where possible, to divide Council districts. And that’s why Villagers living east of Fifth Avenue and south of Washington Square Park have been gerrymandered out of the district that includes the majority of Villagers. What looks logical on a map is not necessarily the way to define communities.

I urge you to correct this situation by adhering, as much as possible to Community Board lines. Please end this gerrymandering and make Greenwich Village whole again. In doing so you will not only improve this district, but will probably also improve the lines for the adjacent districts.