

PEOPLE FOR CHERYL

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Testimony Resubmitted for the August 16, 2012 Districting Commission Hearing

August 16, 2012

NYC Districting Commission
253 Broadway, 7th Floor
New York, NY 10007

Dear Commissioners:

My name is Cheryl Pahaham, and I am a Democrat running for City Council in District 7 in northern Manhattan. I am very troubled that New York City's redistricting process can be used by politicians to ensure their future in politics and to thwart their competitors.

New York City could provide a more objective basis for redefining Council district boundaries. Even though we will never take the politics out of redistricting, we can make the process less susceptible to tampering by elected officials and more open to public input. New York City's process could be improved in the following ways.

1. Open up the process to a more informed public debate. Pass a local law to require and fund the analysis and publication of demographic and economic data by City Council district and election district in widely accessible electronic formats including cvs and pdf files, in both tabular and mapped forms based on the most recent decennial data, not estimates from prior years. The analysis should include totals by Council and election district showing the voting age population and the voting age population of citizens. The data should be made available to the public within one year of the release of the latest decennial Census data.

Citizens need this information before they can have any kind of informed opinion about how their Council district boundaries should be changed. Otherwise, the process will continue to be distorted by the interests of elected officials. Redistricting is too important to be left solely in the hands of politicians whose primary interest is furthering their own trajectories and whose positions in office give them the power to manipulate outcomes.

2. Hire a professional staff of social scientists and researchers to develop a series of proposals for each district that could be reviewed by the public on-line in widely used graphical and tabular formats or on paper before the commission begins its own deliberations on these proposals. This will reduce the impact of any politician who feels entitled to carve up Council districts for his or her own political gain.

3. Bring the commission into the 21st century. Require it to have an interactive website

and allow citizens to submit their comments and opinions on-line, including voting on proposals before the commission begins to deliberate. The website should also stream and archive video of the commission's meetings and deliberations.

4. Consider revising the timelines for this process in the New York City Charter so that the public has time to consider proposed revisions to Council districts that are drafted by the commission before any hearings are held. This change could also benefit candidates who are forced to invest resources and time in races without knowing how their electoral prospects will be impacted by redistricting. And, why hold these hearings in August, when people take vacations?

5. Require the commission to consider the impact of the redistricting proposals on declared candidates in the upcoming Council races. Redistricting should not be used to stifle competition in Council races. Establish standards in New York City's Charter that would help guide this work.

6. Establish standards in redistricting that will increase the representation of women on the Council.

I make these recommendations because I have learned of an unofficial plan to move me out of Council District 7—the district in which I have declared my candidacy—as if this plan were a done deal. Yet, the commission has no website and has not released any data or maps for the public to consider, even though it is holding public hearings.

The purported plan apparently reflects an effort to address the population decline in Council District 10, which lost between 15,000 and 20,000 residents. The commission, if it gives even a cursory examination of the issues involved, will see that there are other more obvious options for addressing the population decline in District 10. One option, which would better maintain existing ethnic and geographic ties, is to reshape District 10 by extending it further north and further south.

The purported proposal to move District 10 further west and to subsume all of Inwood does nothing to further the rights of protected minority groups such as African Americans and Latinos, as District 7 is already a majority Latino district. Instead, this proposal only strengthens the power of politicians now in office and rewards their allies, while reducing choice for voters in District 7 and neutralizing viable competition from new candidates. This proposal seems like a political deal, not a decision based on the best interests of local residents, and should not be taken seriously.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cheryl Pahaham". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Cheryl Pahaham