



Testimony to the New York City Districting Commission

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Good Evening and thank you. My name is David Pollock, I have been at the Jewish Community Relations of New York since 1980 and I currently am honored to serve as Associate Executive Director. Due to my longevity this is the fourth "cycle" for which I am monitoring and commenting on the redistricting process on behalf of the Jewish communities of New York.

I said "*Jewish communities*". It is important to note that there is no homogeneous Jewish community of New York. We are incredibly diverse: geographically we reside throughout the city; religiously we span the spectrum from secularism to Ultra-Orthodoxy; economically we are rich, poor and everything between; politically we span the spectrum from liberal to conservative and our immigrants in New York include concentrations of émigrés from the former Soviet Union, Israel, Syria, Iran and many, many more. My service to the Jewish

community has taught me that no one speaks for the entire Jewish community. At the JCRC-NY we try to identify and to develop consensus among the various Jewish communities and to act when there is consensus.

Your Executive Director, Hon. Carl Hum, reached out to us soon after he was appointed as the Executive Director of the Districting Commission and we met with him and other members of your staff. We shared with him information about the Jewish communities of New York and some of our general concerns.

The information included maps showing the “contours” of the Jewish communities and of the Russian-speaking communities. These maps were developed from voter registration and census data. The maps might not be exact, but they tell the story.

In our meeting with your staff we discussed our approach to the redistricting process. Decades ago, the JCRC-NY developed a general framework with which to approach the redistricting process which has needed only slight revisions. The framework includes three basic precepts:

1. **Elected officials.** We believe that the interests of the Jewish community can be protected and advanced by sensitive and effective individuals, whether they are Jewish, or not.
2. **District lines.** We believe that the district lines affecting Jewish communities should facilitate the election of effective, sensitive and receptive public officials.
3. **Maintaining a critical mass.** Towards that end we have advocated that districts include – wherever possible – a critical mass of Jews; and that district lines keep smaller Jewish communities together so that their electoral clout is not negated.

We of the JCRC-NY-NY know well that New York City’s diversity is dynamic. The history of New York City reflects and celebrates continuously evolving, demographic snapshots. Your difficult task is to create a plan that addresses and empowers those represented in the ever-changing demographic reality. That is hard enough, but the *New York City Charter* and federal law add to your burden and we will not even discuss the “political advice” that you are inevitably given.

In my considered opinion the *Preliminary Draft* is not perfect, but I understand the underlying reasoning behind many of your decisions. Moreover, in my analysis of your maps I found many instances where you clearly looked at the JCRC-NY contour maps and our precepts and drew lines that, for the most part, respected both our communities and our principles. For that we are deeply grateful. I do admit that I may have used some data that did not accurately reflect demographic changes. My colleague Rabbi Niederman will submit updated maps of Williamsburg in his testimony. I urge that your revisions include the changes he suggested.

While listening to many of the proposals made to you over the last few months, another concern arose in my mind; that the redistricting process, with its multiple priorities has the potential to inadvertently contribute to the Balkanization of our government. We do not believe that districts should be homogeneous.

Representatives with narrow constituencies are more likely to cling to symbolic actions and advocate for services catering solely to narrow clienteles. Their effectiveness is often compromised by their inability to compromise and their constituents are the ones to suffer. As the Co-Chair of the JCRC-NY Commission on Government Relations, Prof. Ester Fuchs, wrote to me last night, "The key to effective representation for the Jewish community is having large enough numbers (what our principles call a "critical mass") in a district to be an important member of a broader coalition." I believe that the same holds true for other communities. I believe that elected officials that are constantly called on to effectively balance parochial and universal concerns are destined to serve our city well.

In conclusion, I express our gratitude to the members of the Districting Commission and its staff. Your assignment is difficult and you are doing it well. Thank you for your service.

