

TESTIMONY

Brooklyn, New York

October 11, 2012

Good Evening:

My name is Michael Roberts and I have lived and worked in Brooklyn for over 20 years. I have also been involved in the political arena for some time. So I know that the way that district lines are drawn puts voters together in groups — some voters are kept together in one district and others are separated into different districts. And in our system, whichever group has more votes within a district usually decides which representative wins. Just take a look at Brooklyn and redistricting boundaries tell the story of a divided, segregated city.

Sadly, that's not going to change anytime soon because redistricting is about political and economic power and no groups want to be disenfranchised and weakened. So the least politically represented group gets the shaft — all the time. Over the years redistricting commissions have kept Jewish, Italian, Caucasian and some African-American communities intact guaranteeing political and economic power.

African-American, Caribbean-American and new immigrant minority districts are routinely cracked, packed and diluted so that they do not threaten the political status quo. Today, City Council districts look as cases of very bad pop art done by a drunken artist who simply splashed paint on a piece of blank canvass. This kind of gerrymandering is at work in the proposed lines for 2013.

The way the lines are drawn can keep a community together or split it apart, changing whether it has representatives who feel responsible for its concerns. The way the lines are drawn can impact who wins an election. Ultimately, the way the lines are drawn can change who controls the governing body, and can change which policies get passed into law. Many incumbents pay consultants and lawyers large sums of money to have their districts custom-designed, with enough friendly voters to make it extremely likely that they would win the election. There is token opposition and votes are wasted.

The present proposed lines and boundaries in Brooklyn would crack districts, eliminate political challengers, dilute minority neighborhoods, waste votes, split communities of interest and most egregious let politicians pick and choose their votes instead of voters picking their leaders.

Mr. Commissioner, you said that you want to get it right. Please review the UNITY MAP submitted and proposed by the Center for Law and Social Justice. You don't have to agree with everything on the map but the CLSJ has done a far better job at adhering to the spirit and letter of the New York City Charter and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 than your Redistricting Commission has done. Your boundaries disenfranchise people of color. They are not fair.