

**Testimony of
Zenaida Mendez
Founder, National Dominican Women's Caucus
Before the New York City Districting Commission
Thursday August 16, 2012**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak at this very important hearing. I am Zenaida Mendez, a concerned citizen and the founder of the National Dominican Women's Caucus.

The National Dominican Women's Caucus is a non-partisan organization that unites activists, scholars and advocates in the pursuit of a vision of an inclusive and effective democracy.

As a result, the Caucus promotes reforms that are inclusive to all New Yorkers and motivates the participation of all in civil society. Naturally, we also focus on immigrants groups being that most of us are immigrants ourselves.

We are advocates of equal gender political participation and work to foster responsive and responsible governance.

The Caucus has conducted a Transformative Training Institute that trains women Latinas on understanding the US form governance; in the last few years we have zoned in on New York City political participation and the electoral process working with new US naturalized citizens.

Since 2010, we have been monitoring the redistricting processes across the nation, particularly in Latino communities. Since Dominicans are the second largest Latino population in New York City, we focus on New York City as well as New York State.

What the district lines look like for the City of New York has an effect on the quality of life of every New Yorker.

As an Afro Latina of Dominican descent that came to New York City in 1969, I am very concerned about an issue that I noticed in your meeting on June 17, 2012 with the presenter from the NYC planning commission.

That is the issue of how the term white Non-Latino was and is used. I feel and felt during that meeting that we the Afro Latino were left out of the equation.

I ask this commission to please take a very careful look at the Latino population in the United States. We are one country comprised of 21 Latin American Countries and the Spanish speaking Caribbean.

Again, at the meeting I am referencing, there were references to white Latino vs. Anglos. Latinos are representatives of three major ethnicities: Native Indian, Black from Africa and white from Spain for the most part, but we have the same language in common, Espanol.

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I did not recall referring to any other ethnic groups in NYC in such a divisive manner.

What the district lines look like for the City of New York has an effect on the quality of life of every New Yorker. Therefore these are imperative:

- **Fair and effective representation.** The redistricting plan must be established in a manner that ensures the fair and effective representation of the racial and language minority groups in New York City which are protected by the Voting Rights Act. N.Y. CITY CHARTER, ch. 2-A, Section 52(1)(b) (2004).

There is a large Honduran community in New York City in particular in the Bronx. The Honduran's Garifonas Community is one of the largest Black Spanish speaking community. We also have the Dominican Community with a larger number of Afro Dominicans just to mentioned a few. Garifonas and Afro-Dominican speak Spanish.

- **Communities of Interest.** District lines should keep intact neighborhoods and communities with established ties of common interest and association, whether historical, racial, economic, ethnic, religious or other. N.Y. CITY CHARTER, ch. 2-A, Section 52(1)(c) (2004)

- **Contiguity.** Each district must be contiguous, and whenever a part of a district is separated from the rest of the district by a body of water, there must be a connection by a bridge, a tunnel, a tramway or by regular ferry service. N.Y. CITY CHARTER, ch. 2-A, Section 52(2) (2004).

I am a resident of Hell's Kitchen, (Clinton) in the last redistricting Clinton Tower 790 11th Avenue corner 54 Street, where I reside, was taking out of the Council representative at the time Tom Duane and it was put in representative Councilwoman Gale Brewer. Community Board 4 includes Chelsea and Clinton; Clinton tower is part of Clinton therefore it make more sense to keep Clinton tower in Speaker Christine Quinn's City council district. I hope that you take a look at this issue and restore Clinton tower to the rest of the neighborhood. We have more in common with Chelsea than with the upper West Side.

- **Compactness.** Each district must be compact and cannot be more than twice as long as it is wide. The redistricting plan must be established in a manner that minimizes the sum of the length of the boundaries of all of the districts included in the plan. N.Y. CITY CHARTER, ch. 2-A, Section 52(1) (d)(g) (2004).

This commission has a very serious job and I ask to make sure that Latino communities are not separated by skin color. I believe your job is to make sure communities which have common interest be together for the common good.

This committee has set itself a commendable and necessary task. I wish you the best.