

Testimony Before the NYC Districting Commission Public Hearing
August 16, 2012
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Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Gale A. Brewer, and I have represented the 6th New York City Council District, comprising the Upper West Side and Northern Clinton, since 2002.

The 6th Council District as currently drawn extends from the northern side of 54th Street to the southern side of 96th Street, from Central Park to the Hudson River. In my opinion, this is a great example of a compact, contiguous District. It is my opinion that district lines should not dissect traditional neighborhoods. Neighborhoods in New York City have distinct personalities, and to the greatest extent possible these neighborhoods should be represented by Elected Officials who are familiar with unique neighborhood issues. There has been much discussion about how best to define “communities of interest” throughout the redistricting discussion, but, for me the idea, at least in this case, is simple: Neighborhoods in New York City are unique. West Siders and East Siders are different. The Upper West Side and the Village are different. While there are certainly great people and great Elected Officials from all over the city, I believe that only an Upper West Sider can truly understand Upper West Side issues, and the same applies for many neighborhoods in our city.

The Upper West Side is a distinct place and community, with its own social and political history, its own landmarks, gathering places, institutions, bus routes, shops, houses of worship, school districts, plaques to famous residents, and its own memorials to local fallen heroes. Everyone knows where it is; it is demarked on maps, and its political representatives live within its natural boundaries. This is as it should be. The Upper West Side is not an artificial construct created by a committee, or some arbitrary lines on a map. It is an actual place, with recognizable physical boundaries and a constituency that knows where it lives and who represents it.

I have a few other points:

- 1) The 6th Council District includes a small portion of Community Board 4 in Clinton, and a large portion of Community Board 7 on the Upper West Side. I think it is important for Council Districts to cover more than one community board district. The reason I believe this is that you need different perspectives from elected leaders on community board issues. For example, because three Council Members represent portions of Community Board 7, I gained support from my colleagues that was very helpful in the passage of the recently-passed Upper West Side Neighborhood Retail Streets Proposal. Although it may sound counter to my comments above, I do believe that Districts should include more than one community board.

- 2) In the area from 96 Street to 110 Street on the West Side of Manhattan, constituents reside in either Council District 8 or Council District 9. I don't know the answer to these strangely drawn Districts, but many of these people below 110 Street consider themselves Upper West Siders, and don't necessarily identify with their Districts that extend into other parts of Manhattan. This is not meant as a slight to those Council Members, but

rather a reality of the fact that these Districts are quite diverse, and contain multiple neighborhoods. The numbers are challenging, and I know that as a Commission these are the issues you are grappling with.

The Districting Commission has a very important job to do, in a very short period of time, as redistricting determines New Yorkers' elected representation for the next ten years. I look forward to reviewing the first draft of District maps, as there are several areas of the city with serious demographic changes since the 2000 census. As the co-chair of the Manhattan Delegation, I am particularly interested in seeing the new lines in northern Manhattan. I would urge the Commission to do everything in its power to respect the traditional communities of interest in Manhattan, and throughout the rest of the five boroughs.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify, and I look forward to working with you throughout this process.