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August 16, 2012

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Testimony Submitted by  
Council Member Inez E. Dickens,  
Assistant Deputy Majority Leader  
New York City Council  
To the New York City Districting Commission

I represent the 9th Council District in the New York City Council. I was born here, live here and have witnessed many changes that have shaped the mosaic of Upper Manhattan. Many of these changes were made possible by the power of the vote that enabled residents to have an equitable voice in shaping policy and gaining resources vital to the welfare of communities of significant minority populations that heretofore had suffered from voter disenfranchisement/suppression.

My specific district encompasses Harlem, Morningside Heights, the northern portion of the Upper West Side, and a small portion of East Harlem. Further, it is part of an overall protected, voting district. I believe that it is imperative that the current protected, voting districts be maintained. Voters send a message not only as to who represents them but what issues are of priority importance. Dismantling these districts will destroy the collective voice of minority populations who are continuing to fight, especially in this uncertain economy, for basic human rights, for fair housing, a quality education, jobs, and issues of hunger and homelessness. In addition, many of the minority held political seats in New York City were created because of the protected voting rights district enactments. Our minority elected officials, many who also represent the communities that they were born and bred in, will most certainly be impacted by the dismantling of protected voting rights districts. This would be tragic because our minority elected officials know the problems that many communities of minority populations suffer because they have lived through the very same challenges and that is why minority



representatives are so passionate and dedicated to the issues.

Additionally, with specific reference to my district, it is one of the most diverse in New York City. Numerous stakeholders and institutions in the community understand the importance of preserving such a district. I have been truly blessed to represent such a district, but we must remember to fight for inclusion for all "communities of special interest". It is my hope that the Executive Director and fellow Commissioners, when reviewing the population data for the drawing of the lines will recognize several missing elements. Although the prison population is now accounted for in the Census, what is missing are individuals considered homeless, yet based in the district. The shelter population is also unaccounted for, as there are numerous shelters in the district.

The same very population that fought for the right to vote is being disenfranchised across the country and we need to ensure that the clock is not turned back so that our protected populations become once again disenfranchised and voiceless. Groups encompassed under the term minority have gotten broader over the decades, which is expected and appropriate, but that does not mean that the historic definition of the term should not continue to be protected. That does not mean that we must forget the legacy of those who gave their blood and in some cases their life in the civil rights movement to gain the right to vote. Our historic protected, voting rights districts must be preserved.

I sincerely and respectfully urge the Commission to take this into serious consideration. Thank you.