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Testimony for the New York City Districting Commission Public Hearing- Oct. 4, 2012

Good evening to the Districting Commission and to the members of my community that have joined us here today.

The critical nature of the districting process is not lost on anyone in this room this evening. We have come here to say to you that we know that districting will affect the future of this community for the next decade and beyond. And we have come with a resounding voice to describe to you how the lines for the council districts in Upper Manhattan should be drawn to reflect the dynamic demographics of our community.

Today I am, no doubt, speaking to you as a senior member of the New York City Council representing the district that we currently sit in, but I am also speaking to you as someone that has lived in Upper Manhattan, in Harlem, my whole life. I'm speaking as someone that has participated in shaping and fostering the vitality of our community; it's political vitality; it's social vitality; it's cultural vitality. Moreover I have owned and operated a business in this community. A real estate business that depends on a deep knowledge of the constituent communities and demographic patterns that make up Upper Manhattan. I can say with the assurity of multiple generations at my back, that I **KNOW** this robust and dynamic part of our city.

And it is with that deep knowledge and experience that I can say, respectfully, that the Districting Commission's first map does not reflect the reality of this community. At first glance I was disappointed in the map because it appeared to ignore obvious natural boundaries like the large cliff that separates the Polo Grounds and Rangel Houses from Washington Heights, but connects those developments to Central Harlem. I was disappointed that the Commission's map ignored the obvious, and more importantly, the SIMPLE demarcation that Amsterdam Avenue constitutes between 125th St. all the way to 155th St. It was disappointing that the Commission's proposal ignored the desires of the community between 96th St. and 110th St. on the Westside to be represented by one elected official that could be accountable to their needs instead of spread across multiple elected officials. It was disappointing that 'La Marqueta' an important institution in East Harlem would be irrationally drawn into my district. But quite frankly, nothing was more disappointing than the manner in which the proposed plan encodes a cynicism pushed by some disparate elements in our own communities that Latinos and African Americans cannot work



together to elect a representative of the community's choosing. A proposed plan that assumes Latino is just Latino and ignores the rich national identities that distinguish Puerto Ricans, and Dominicans, and Mexicans, and Columbians to name a few. We reject the cynicism of a plan that cracks the Dominican community in half at I-95 and asserts that the Dominican community south of I-95 has more in common with the Upper Westside than with the other part of Washington Heights currently represented by the same elected official.

But that disappointment was at first glance, because I was thankfully informed by the Commission that this was merely a first draft that was produced looking solely at census numbers indiscriminate of the particulars of our community. I was informed that the testimony provided tonight would guide any further attempts to draw the maps and those maps would be a more accurate depiction of the community's wishes.

After closely examining the rationale that produced the proposed maps by the Commission, we are here today to describe to you what we are calling the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Districting Plan. The UMED Plan corrects the disappointments that I just described for you. Let's talk boundaries. Our plan suggests these boundaries:

The district boundaries of the 9th Councilmanic district should be Amsterdam and Morningside Avenues to the west, 110th Street to the south, 155th Street and the Polo Grounds and Rangel Houses to the north, and Lexington and Madison Avenues to the east.

The district boundaries of the 7th Councilmanic District should have a contiguous border along the Hudson River to the west, rest at 97th Street to the south, Morningside and Amsterdam Avenues to the west, and follow Fort Washington Avenue to Interstate 95 (I-95)/the George Washington Bridge entrance. I-95 is a common sense boundary and the district lines should not go further north than I-95. Also to follow historic district lines and maintain the connections of communities of interest the district should also include the area encompassing Jumel Terrace Historic District.

The district boundaries for the 10th Councilmanic should include the total area north of I-95 including the wholly contained neighborhoods of Hudson Heights and Inwood. For population purposes the district has to extend south of the common sense I-95 boundary. That extension should not crack in half the heart of Washington Heights' Dominican community at the I-95 boundary as the commission's plan suggests. Instead the area east of Fort Washington Avenue and west of Amsterdam Avenue down to 155th Street should be included in the 10th Councilmanic district.

If we follow these boundaries we end up with a plan that is simple, balanced, and fair. A plan that is simple because we use long unbroken common sense boundaries and stray away from the jagged blocks that are the harbingers of gerrymandering. These recommended district boundaries are logical because they are based on Community District lines recognized in this city since 1975.

The plan is balanced because we manage to keep major institutions like Columbia University and City College wholly contained within single districts. We also do the same with communities

like Hudson Heights and Inwood, Sugar Hill and Hamilton Heights, and the portion of the Upper Westside between 96th St. and 110th St, otherwise known as Manhattan Valley. Instead of being split between districts these neighborhoods are now contained wholly within one district or another.

Finally, and most importantly, the UMED Plan introduces the realistic characteristics of Upper Manhattan, which previous maps ignore. Our plan acknowledges that the 9th Council District that I represent is a traditionally African American District that deserves to be protected. The plan does not crack in half, but instead recognizes the demographic realities to our north and solidifies the 10th Council District as a primarily Dominican community. And our plan sees the potential for collaborative action, for a coalition, if you will, in the 7th Council District. This is a critical component to fairness because that district is in transition. It is extraordinarily mixed with African American, Latinos of multiple nationalities, and White voters. For a fair coalition the courts have set forth three important standards that our proposed district meets. First, the majority of the district has to be constituted as compromising the protected class of minorities. Ours is with not only a majority, but with that majority composing far over 50% of the population. Second, there has to be a pattern of voter behavior confirming the possibility for a coalition. That most definitely exists. Even a cursory look at the voting patterns in the areas we have identified does not indicate that voters will only vote for their race. In fact, races over the last 10 years up and down the ballot prove otherwise. And finally there needs to be evidence that a minority candidate can beat a majority candidate and that is obviously the case in this district. Several court cases, including cases even in the State of New York (Ex.1. Thornburg v. Gingles, Ex.2. Arbor Hill Concerned Citizens Neighborhood Association v. County of Albany And Albany County Board Of Elections, Ex.3. Wilson v. Eu) have proven that our approach, an approach that defeats cynicism and enshrines the notion that we can work together, is the right approach.

Simple, Fair, and Balanced we ask you, I ask you as a lifetime resident of this community, to adopt this approach.

Thank you.