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*Testimony before the New York City Districting Commission  
August 16, 2012*

Good afternoon members of the New York City Districting Commission. My name is Robert Jackson and I represent the 7<sup>th</sup> Council District in Manhattan, which includes the neighborhoods of West Harlem (Hamilton Heights and Sugar Hill), parts of Morningside Heights, Central Harlem, Washington Heights and Inwood. I'm here today to ask that the Commission strongly consider maintaining the current lines of the 7<sup>th</sup> Councilmanic District intact to preserve the neighborhoods and groups of common interest together.

My recommendation of keeping District 7 intact is informed by my experience as the district's elected official for over a decade and as a resident of over 30 years, both of which have permitted me to witness and be a part of the binding community interactions and residential patterns that have emerged over the last couple of decades. The Voting Rights Act and the requirements under the Department of Justice as it pertains to adjusting the lines every ten years also factor into justifying keeping the 7<sup>th</sup> Council District as it currently stands whole.

The majority of the lines encompassing the district have been for the most part unchanged for over two decades and these neighborhoods have integrated and created different pockets of diverse groups. The sense of unity created over the years goes beyond racial and social differences. Any drastic changes or shifts in lines may threaten communities that have bonded over time to complement each other and splinter groups that share common interests, lifestyles and backgrounds.

I'm going to give you a brief verbal tour of my district and highlight the characteristics that make it inherently one unit. Currently we have three historic districts that call District 7 home and they are Jumel Terrace, Hamilton Heights/Sugar Hill and Audubon Park. These neighborhoods have been part of the district for decades and bring a certain characteristic to the area with cultural institutions such as the Hispanic Society of America, Trinity Church, Harlem School of the Arts, Dance theatre of Harlem, the Metropolitan Museum of the Cloisters, The Hamilton

Grange National Memorial, Morris Jumel Mansion and the Dyckman Farmhouse- to only name a few. These institutions are neighborhood mainstays that populate the long stretch of the district drawing residents, visitors and business owners. Consequently, these areas are experiencing rejuvenation as many new small businesses are opening and with the expansion of Columbia University, more people are migrating and enjoying the diversity that these neighborhoods have to offer.

In the southern part of my district, we have the Morningside Heights/ West Harlem Sanitation Coalition. This coalition is a cooperative between General Grant Houses, a NYCHA development, and Morningside Gardens, a six building co-op development. This neighborhood group is fighting for environmental justice and has been educating residents about solid waste since 1994. Together they created the first recycling program within NYCHA. This area cannot be separated as they rely on each other to gain access to continued resources to expand their program. Just as important, is the Hands Across the Avenue that these same aforementioned groups have hosted annually for years. As the name implies, it is an event that promotes unity between neighboring groups, development, and residents within the district. Like one big family everyone cooks meals, dance and share in the celebration of being one big family.

Hamilton Heights is a mixed ethnic neighborhood that in itself is vibrant and becoming more engaged in community and civic life every day. There are several associations of homeowners, business owners, education, quality of life, and parks that pay homage to this area. We see individuals of different backgrounds building coalitions and voicing concerns at public hearings and community boards.

As we move along in the district, another community that has been there for decades is the Orthodox Jewish community that have roots very deep in the current geographic area north and west of 181<sup>st</sup> and Broadway and must be maintained. This community can't be divided as many of the synagogues, yeshivas, and their senior center is located within the 7<sup>th</sup> Council District. This brings into light the importance of keeping the lines from 179<sup>th</sup> street and beyond as they are, as a way to simplify the division of the councilmanic districts, Broadway is considered by many on both sides of this famous artery as a natural divider. Everything to the west of Broadway belongs to District 7 and everything towards the east pertains to District 10.

Inwood Hill Park which is towards the Northern part of my district is another huge physical anchor and community anchor for the surrounding community that hovers towards the west side of Broadway. The park is a part of the last remaining forest New York City. The hosting neighborhood of Inwood intermingles with its thriving Dyckman strip that attracts many weekenders for "brunch" and lively dinner with family and friends in the evenings. Small businesses and developers are coming to the area to build on the economic growth that has been speared on on by the strip. An example of this is the eco-dock that is in the works to be built by the marina. The neighborhood is balanced out by the Good Sheperd Church which among other things, is home to many on Memorial Day and 9-11 to participate in a ceremony that honors all the hometown heroes that have paid the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom.

I am proud to represent a district that has over five miles of continuous park and forest bordering the Hudson River and living in New York City it is imperative that this section remain together. Areas such Inwood Hill Park, the Cloisters and Stan Fields are important to keep together because segmenting this land would be detrimental. Proper oversight is needed in order to maintain the lands for the residents of the area and to continue to support organizations and clubs that have formed in order to enjoy these natural resources.

An additional argument to preserve the Hamilton Heights and West Harlem within the councilmanic lines is that it would allow the proper racial plurality envisioned by Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act to be maintained. Not seeking a change would allow the federal Preclearance process to advance with little opposition from DOJ.

Lastly, and as you are well aware of, the councilmanic lines have to be adjusted in order to represent the current population data of the area. Based on the Census 2010 data, Council District 7 has a population of 156,217, which reflects a 3.7% decrease from the previous 2000 census. According to the Department of Justice guidelines, the current lines of the district do not need to be modified since the current population 156,217 is within the acceptable 5% margin.

The lines being redrawn will have a lasting impact on the communities represented for generations to come. It is important that we keep these neighborhoods and coalitions, who rely on each other, to continue flourishing and remain integral parts of the district and society. People become attached to the areas they stem from and drastically changing the district will hinder them from continuing to advocate for adequate representation on all levels.

Thank you for listening and I hope that you will consider my testimony in your recommendations. My office is open and available to answer any and all inquiries that will help justify keeping the 7<sup>th</sup> district intact as the members of the commission move towards finalizing their recommendations in this very important process.

