



STATEMENT OF OCA-NY

Before the New York City Council Redistricting Commission

Given by Henry Chang

August 16, 2012

Good Evening. My name is Henry Chang and I am testifying on behalf of OCA-NY. Founded in 1976, OCA-NY, formerly known as Organization for Chinese Americans, is a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to protecting and advancing the political, economic, social, and cultural rights of Asian Americans.

OCA-NY represents the 5 boroughs of New York City. In Manhattan's Chinatown, we've co-sponsored candidates' forums for City Council District 1, the office of Mayor, and State Assembly District 64 and conducted voter registration on community street corners. Monthly, OCA-NY board meets in Chinatown and our annual fundraising gala has been held in different restaurants throughout Chinatown. The Museum of Chinese in America was the site of OCA-NY's Sixth Annual Hate Crimes Prevention Art Exhibit, the showing of "Vincent Who?", our general annual membership meeting, and press conferences. We march annually in the Lunar New Year Parade, participate in community street fairs, and support Chinatown Beautification Day. Our community outreach includes hosting a health day, educating Chinatown residents on our shared history with African Americans, and sponsoring bone marrow drives and holiday parties for low-income Chinese children. We've partnered with Charles B. Wang Community Health Center, Chinese Progressive Association, Chinese American Planning Council, Chinatown Manpower Project, Asian Americans for Equality, Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, and family associations on voter empowerment, health, education, combating hate crimes, and immigration. We helped document and interview Chinatown residents and organizations impacted by 9/11 for OCA National's book, *Voices of Healing, Spirit and Unity after 9/11*.

OCA-NY's work also extends to coalition building and helping Asians living in Manhattan's Lower East Side. Working with Chinatown Youth Initiatives, Ana Luisa Garcia Center, Loisadas, OCA-NY held its 4th Annual Hate Crimes Prevention Art Exhibit at the Educational Alliance and Sports Tournament at Seward Park, both located in the heart of the Lower East Side. We were the lead advocate on securing a governor's pardon for Qing Wu, an adult resident of the Lower East Side facing removal from the U.S. because of a teenage criminal record. Currently, we are the lead advocate for Pvt. Danny Chen, who grew up in Chinatown and lived in the Lower East Side; 8 soldiers have been charged in connection with his death in Afghanistan. OCA-NY has been honored at events by Chinatown-based groups, such as Asian Americans for Equality, MOCA, and Chinatown Youth Initiatives.

The 2010 Census revealed Asian Americans now comprise 13% of the City's population. The number of Asian Americans has soared to a million, with at least 180,000 in Manhattan. Specifically in Chinatown, at least 65% of the residents are Asian.

Support for my testimony is based on my 40 years living in Chinatown, other OCA-NY members' input, and data from the 2010 Census and 2005-2009 American Community Survey. As a novelist, specializing in stories set in Chinatown, I've written a trilogy of mystery books titled, *Chinatown Beat*, *Year of the Dog*, and *Red Jade*. The characters in my books are based on people I've known growing up in Chinatown, events, and the crimes that occurred there. Not only do my stories evolve around crime and violence, I also write about low-



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income people trying to better their lives. At least once a week, I walk less than 10 minutes from my home to the Lower East Side near Houston Street to shop and eat.

I have been involved in several Chinatown issues, such as opposing the Chinatown BID, attending Community Board meetings to oppose holding the terrorist trials in the federal court directly across from Columbus Park, and also efforts to stop the city from tearing up Chatham Square without community input.

City Council District 1

Regarding City Council Districts for lower Manhattan, OCA-NY supports including more of the Lower East Side with the Chinatown community. The Lower East Side and Chinatown share similar socioeconomic data. 92% are renters in Chinatown, which is comparable to 82% in the Lower East Side. The median age in Chinatown is 40 and 39 for the Lower East Side. 74% of Chinese speakers in Chinatown speak English less than very well comparable to 72% in the Lower East Side. 47% of Chinatown residents reported income below the poverty level, similar to 40% of Asians in the Lower East Side. With low-income areas, come lack of services to fight crime, quality health care, and other social services. Gentrification is a major threat. I have seen many people displaced by gentrification in Chinatown and Lower East Side. During my walks around my neighborhood, I have seen investors in the Lower East side reclaim vacant buildings and build high-end bars and cabarets that local residents, such as myself, cannot afford to patronize. In addition, there used to be many rent controlled apartments in Chinatown. As more apartments become decontrolled, landlords renovate and charge \$4,000 to \$5,000/month for an apartment that was originally \$300-\$400 under rent control. Several buildings have burnt down and been replaced by luxury apartments. Many of my fellow Chinatown community members publicly expressed concerns that the rezoning in the Lower East Side to prevent taller buildings would result in high-rise buildings being built in Chinatown. Joining these two neighborhoods together would enable them to speak with one voice on the need for affordable housing and critical social services.