

October 11, 2012

To the Members of the Districting Commission:

Thank you for giving the people of NY City the opportunity to comment on your Districting Map.

My name is Rabbi William Handler, Director of the Boro-park West Community Association, and I fully support today's testimony by Agudath Israel of America.

It is very unfair to the over 500,000 traditionally-oriented Jewish people in Brooklyn to allow them to have only one Councilmember, Mr. Greenfield, when a fair allocation would put the number at three Councilmembers.

In my own neighborhood, Boro-Park West, which runs from Eighth Avenue to Fort Hamilton Parkway, and from 39th Street to 52nd Street, we are currently represented by a person who spends almost all of his time in Park Slope, where he has the base of his support.

From a purely psychological point of view, it is unreasonable to expect him to care about our neighborhood, whose people have values diametrically opposed to his. This translates to a lack of access and a neglect of our day-to-day concerns.

For example, in the recent affair of the pedestrian safety islands that the city's Department of Transportation installed along Fort Hamilton Parkway, our councilman actively opposed our efforts to remove the islands, which were obstructing access by ambulances and emergency services to Maimonides Hospital. His attitude was "Tough Luck. The concrete has been poured, and there is nothing I can do."

We had to reach out to neighboring Boro-Park to get political support for our ultimately-successful effort to remove the islands, which created a safety hazard for our community.

I think we all understand that career politicians have to make a living, and that they want to manipulate and gerrymander the districts as much as possible to ensure their continuation in office for life. But there should be a limit to how far this goes.

If the political class is to maintain their legitimacy, there has to be some relationship of district lines to the real world of citizen participation and representation.

To disenfranchise 500,000 traditional Jewish residents by diluting their voting strength in such a grotesque manner makes a mockery of democracy and elementary fairness.

Therefore, I respectfully recommend that the Commission revises their Councilmatic District boundaries in accordance with the recommendations of Agudath Israel of America.