



Youth Action Programs & Homes, Inc.

An Affiliate of YouthBuild USA • YouthBuild / AmeriCorps Program

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Testimony before the New York Districting Commission Presented by David Calvert, Executive Director, Youth Action YouthBuild in East Harlem

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Good evening. I am David Calvert, Executive Director of Youth Action Programs and Homes, Inc. We usually call our nonprofit organization “**Youth Action YouthBuild in East Harlem.**” We run one of YouthBuild programs across the United States, but we are proud to say that ours is the original YouthBuild program, and that the model was first developed right here in East Harlem/El Barrio. Through YouthBuild, teams of East Harlem youth and adults have renovated 13 formerly vacant five-story tenements, creating 120 units of affordable housing.

I myself grew up in the neighborhood, a product of Washington Houses, local streets, public schools, and warm and friendly neighbors as well as solid family support. From birth on, I was trained to love my neighborhood, to appreciate its uniqueness and history, its diversity and languages, and its prominent role in social movements, including the roles played by the Union Settlement, East Harlem Protestant Parish, East Harlem Interfaith, the Save Metropolitan movement, the original I Have a Dream Program, *Teatro Cuatro* and the *Museo del Barrio*, and of course, YouthBuild.

By now I have lived and worked over 40 years in the neighborhood, and I feel qualified to comment on the proposed Redistricting proposal as it pertains to East Harlem / El Barrio.

I have serious concerns about the Commission's preliminary draft lines for my beloved neighborhood.

The traditional boundaries that make up our neighborhood should be respected. They form part of the social fabric that generates pride and identity, that generates the social capital that sustains us even when we have no money and the jobs dry up. The El Barrio I speak of has been immortalized in song and in art, in our memories and in our murals. It is part of our culture, it matters to us and to New York as a whole, and it should not be slashed in half by this Commission.

In a big city like New York, the importance of relating to our local community is intensified. Downtown, most of us are little people performing low-paid jobs. But back uptown, we are respected, people see us as leaders, and we feel connected and alive. Please don't divide us artificially from neighbors with whom we share this common past and present, by sending them to another district, and at the same time connecting us by a dotted line to a large Bronx population that is separated from us by a river and much more. Nothing against The Bronx or the good people of the South Bronx... we love you, but we have a neighborhood feeling in El Barrio that should not be diminished by arbitrary line-drawing at the table of a Districting Commission.

I join my neighbors in strongly urging the Districting Commission to use the Unity Map proposal as a starting point in re-drawing the 8th District, also taking into account additional feedback you receive from the community through the hearing process. This proposal, crafted by LatinoJustice PRLDEF, the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, the Center for Law and Social Justice at Medgar Evers College and the National Institute for Latino Policy, maximizes representation for people of color in our city while truly preserving communities of interest and respecting neighborhood boundaries. I also urge the Commission to consider another round of hearings after this one, where the public would be invited to comment on a final set of draft lines.

Thank you for your consideration of these petitions.