

**TESTIMONY OF ZELNOR MYRIE
PRESENTED TO THE BRONX PUBLIC HEARING
OF THE
NEW YORK CITY DISTRICTING COMMISSION
AUGUST 23, 2012**

Good Afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Zellnor Myrie and I am a current Bronx resident, Urban Studies graduate student, and former New York City Council aide.

In the coming months, many qualified citizens and policy makers will offer detailed suggestions to the commission that will help advance the tenets of democratic representation in New York City while underscoring the ideals of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Today, I simply want to direct the commission's attention to some of the legislative implications of the districting process to stress the importance of a thorough and comprehensive process that gives communities of color a voice in government.

The expansion of the City Council from 35 members to 51 came on the heels of a Supreme Court decision exhorting our city to increase representation for communities of color in our legislative branch. Representation for representation's sake, of course, was never the goal, and as such, it is important that we measure the impact that increased minority representation has had on the Council.

My graduate research on Council legislation enacted over the past fifteen years suggests that representation hasn't just been nominal, but that Black, Hispanic, and Asian members have incrementally increased their impact on city policy. Consider the following:

From 1998 to 2000, only 8% of passed legislation was sponsored by a Black, Asian, or Hispanic member. From 2001 to 2003, however, that number jumped to 20%. 2004 to 2006 saw an increase to 27% while that number climbed to 31% from 2007 to 2009. During this current session (January of 2010 through June of this year) we are on pace to have 36% of Council legislation sponsored by a minority member.

And this increase isn't just in overall policies; legislation that has particular impact on communities of color like foreclosure prevention, immigrant assistance programs, and enforcement mechanisms aimed at repairing dilapidated housing, has also increased. Seven such bills were passed in the 1998-2000 session, while our current cycle (2010-2012) has already witnessed 37 such bills enacted.

While these passage rates still have room for improvement given the corresponding population numbers of people of color in our city, it is clear that there is a connection between minority representation and policy enactment on the Council. Districting that continues to encourage such representation not only helps engage

constitutionally protected communities in the political process, but helps increase policy outcomes for them as well.

In addition to these implications, I'd also like to ask that the Commission keep our city's growing young population in mind as they render their districting decisions. Our city gained over 300,000 people between the ages of 20-34 over the past decade, and here in my borough, we boast the highest percentage of persons under the age of 18 in the entire city at 26%. Please keep our issues in mind when discussing things like community cohesion as we reflect what the community will look like in the near future.

Thanks again for the opportunity to testify and for your time and attention to these matters.

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