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LatinoJustice PRLDEF

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Greetings, Commissioners of the New York City Redistricting Commission. Thank you for providing me with this opportunity to testify. Redistricting is a critical component of our democracy that will determine the political representation of our great city for the next decade. Historically, this partisan process excludes the voices of marginalized communities often at the cost of diluting or extinguishing their access to the ballot. Our participation and that of our communities in this process is crucial to ensure the communities interest remains visible and protected.

My name is Cesar Z. Ruiz. I am an attorney and Equal Justice Works Legal Fellow sponsored by the Lavan-Harris Family at LatinoJustice PRLDEF. LatinoJustice PRLDEF is a Latinx civil rights organization that fights for equitable treatment of Latinos under the law. We have actively participated in New York City redistricting process over the past several decades, advocating for equitable representation of the Latinx community. We are proud to join and collaborate with our Unity Coalition partners in that effort once again during this redistricting cycle.

I want to start by highlighting the immense growth of New York City's Latino community over the past 10 years. According to recent U.S. Census Bureau data, Latinos comprise 28.3% of New York City's total population and have added over 150,000 residents¹ throughout the city in the past 10 years, in Queens specifically we have added over 54,000 Latino residents. Simply put we can no longer be considered a minority of the electorate; rather,

¹ 154,274 Latino residents to be precise. Source: <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/state-by-state/new-york-population-change-between-census-decade.html>



we are now a significant and decisive voting bloc that deserves the opportunity to elect candidates of our own choosing who represent the values and needs of our communities.

In addressing Latinx representation in the city council and the demographic composition of former city council, I wish to highlight a few salient points which will inevitably inform this process. At this moment, 15 City Council Members, out of 51, identify as Latino or are of Latino heritage, which approximately matches our population share of the City's total population. Regarding the demographic breakdowns of districts, Latinos currently represent a majority in nine City Council districts and have strong pluralities in five additional districts. This representation is not by luck or happenstance. Instead, it reflects the deep commitment of our community members on the local level to elect and empower their leaders to take the oath of public office and serve their communities. Latinx representation in these areas must be maintained in the face of such consistent growth and any reduction in the ability of Latinos to elect candidates of their choice is unacceptable.

Recognizing the demographic trends and shifts in various areas throughout the city as well as the limitations on crossing boroughs, we are recommending a continued crossing between Brooklyn and Queens County (as configured in current 34) connecting the communities of Williamsburg, Bushwick, and Ridgewood. The combination of these areas connects long standing Latino communities of interest that have benefitted from being paired together. Their combination has enabled them to consistently elect candidates of their choice which protect their interests and adequately represent their shared cultural, economic and social interests.

Additionally, we suggest that existing CD 22 take in Woodside houses which is currently in existing District 26. The Woodside housing complex has long been separated from CD 22 unnecessarily which has created unnecessary barriers to meaningful representation for residents in that area. Individuals living in this area attend to schools in CD 22 and are represented by Queens community board # 1 which for the most part is located in existing CD 22. The new boundaries we are suggesting take existing CD 22 south of 31st street following 48th street down to Newtown Road and ending at 51st street as eastern boundary. Connecting this community of interest will unite members of the same community who would benefit from uniform representation.



In the face of such consistent growth, the Latino community cannot accept any dilution in their ability to elect candidates of their choice. Any map drawn by the Commission must reflect what the demographic population numbers show: Latino community that is growing along with its political power, influence, and representation. I thank you for your hard work and the opportunity to testify before you. I look forward to seeing your draft maps and engaging in this vital process.