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THE COUNCIL OF  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
**ALTHEA V. STEVENS**  
COUNCIL MEMBER  
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August, 16, 2022

Dear Chair Walcott and Members of the Districting Commission:

As the duly elected Council Member of the district, I am sending the following comments regarding the 16th Council District of New York City for consideration by the 2022 New York City Districting Commission.

First of all, I want to recognize the work that has gone into the drafting of new Council lines. This is, undeniably, a difficult task and it is apparent the care and consideration the Redistricting Commission has put into this process. However, given the historical disenfranchisement of my community, the community I am privileged to represent, I believe it is my responsibility to write to you expressing my concerns and relaying some of the feedback that has been given to me by constituents of District 16.

- I would like to first start off by talking about the things that were added to my district by the commission that I believe will improve the community, like uniting 161st Street BID in one Council District. This was an essential addition to the district as I have been working closely with the new Director of the 161st Street BID to bring in opportunities to local small business owners and increase engagement with local residents. In addition, the addition of Joyce Kilmer and Franz Sigel Parks to District 16 will strengthen the work that I've been doing with Friends 4 Parks (a volunteer - based organization enhancing the 4 neighborhood parks of lower Grand Concourse - Mullaly, Macombs Dam and Franz Siegel and Joyce Kilmer Parks). As most of the group's volunteers live in Council District 16, I was proud to allocate to them their first Councilmanic funds for work in the two parks currently located in the district. With the addition of Franz Siegel and Joyce Kilmer Parks in Council District 16, we are not only able to unify the 4 Parks area, but also the parks with the individuals who most use and care for them.
- Like many other predominantly Black and brown areas of our city, District 16 includes disengaged communities. Communities who have, historically, been left out of the decision-making process, and do not feel motivated to engage now. According to the American Community Survey, approximately 32-40% of District 16 residents live under the Federal Poverty Level, with one of the highest shelter and children in shelter

- populations across the city. Although this makes the job of the Redistricting Commission more complicated, it is important to consider and weigh these unheard voices in this process. Just because someone is wary of or unaware of how to engage in this process does not mean they should be ignored in this process. I am writing to implore the Commission to pay special attention to such communities and not let them be drowned out by those with the loudest voices. Engaging these communities and uplifting unheard voices has been a priority for my office and we have just started making inroads. I have partnered closely with my community boards to build up leaders and demonstrate to residents that they have access to their elected officials. Dividing these communities will only erase this progress and further discourage disengaged residents from getting involved.
- In addition to the work I have been doing to unite and strengthen engagement across the district, I have had a particular focus on youth, working closely with principals to meet student needs. I have had a particular partnership with the principal of IS 229 at 275 Harlem River Park Bridge, with our collaboration focusing on local gun violence. I ask that the commission consider keeping this school in Council District 16 so we can continue building on this work and develop alternative pathways for our young people.
  - There are entities in our community that merit consideration despite having no voice at all. The waterfront of the West Bronx is one of, if not the, most under-invested and under-utilized stretches of waterfront in New York City. Much of this stretch along the Harlem River is a dumping ground and virtually inaccessible, an issue I have been working with local advocates even before I was in office. To keep this momentum going, it is vital that there remains continuous representation of the current stretch of waterfront that falls within District 16 (the stretch between 165th Street and the northern boundary of Roberto Clemente State Park). Maintaining, or even expanding, the unification of the West Bronx waterfront would allow the growing coalition, currently based in Highbridge, to coordinate closely with their City Council Member to fight for equitable resources and recognition. Additionally, dividing the West Bronx waterfront and separating the Highbridge section from Roberto Clemente puts into jeopardy the growing coalition
  - The largest concern I have after reviewing the preliminary maps concerns the preservation of Black communities. I have consistently heard growing concerns from black community leaders that their voices will be diluted, and the beautiful diversity of the Bronx will not be accurately reflected in future years. As this was the impetus for the creation of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, this is of grave concern to me. Comparing the current map of Council District 16 to the preliminary plan released on July 15th, the proportion of the Black population decreased from 40% to 36%. Some of this change is a result of the removal of two historically predominantly African-American neighborhoods from District 16 - the area including Woodstock Terrace (890 Trinity Avenue, Bronx and 920 Trinity Avenue, Bronx), Forest Houses (the area from 163rd Street to 166th Street, between Trinity Avenue and Tinton Avenue), and the area including Sedgewick Avenue and Undercliff Avenue (from approximately

170th Street to Roberto Clemente State Park) and River Park Towers (10 Richman Plaza, 20 Richman Plaza, 30 Richman Plaza, and 40 Richman Plaza). As areas where the African-American population of the Bronx has had a longstanding presence and long history of active community leaders, it is imperative to keep these communities together. As the current representative of these districts, I implore the commission to consider reinstating Council District 16 to include these neighborhoods and preserve the unification of like communities.

I appreciate the opportunity to share my testimony and provide feedback on the preliminary maps as has been shared with me. I urge the Commission to take the above issues and communities into consideration as you revise the preliminary maps.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss these points further, you may reach out to me at [astevens@council.nyc.gov](mailto:astevens@council.nyc.gov) or my Chief of Staff at [kconnolly@council.nyc.gov](mailto:kconnolly@council.nyc.gov).

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Althea Stevens', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Council Member Althea Stevens  
District 16, Bronx

DistrictR Map including the above-proposed changes: <https://districtr.org/plan/138063>