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August 18, 2022

Dennis M. Walcott, Chair
NYC Districting Commission
253 Broadway, 3rd Floor
New York, NY 10007

Dear Chairman Walcott,

As a current State elected official and former New York City Council Member, I write to you regarding the New York City Districting Commission's proposed maps. Upon review of the proposed maps, it is clear to me that the current map of the 44th Council District needs to be revised and changed to reflect the cultural, ethnic, and religious demographics of the neighborhood.

Chapter 2A, Section 52 of the New York City Charter sets forth explicit instructions that "*District lines shall keep intact neighborhoods and communities with established ties of common interest and association, whether historical, racial, economic, ethnic, religious or other.*" The needs and identity of the 44th Council District are unique, and we need a unique representative to convey our voice in the City Council.

The 44th Council District is a historic district in New York City. It contains the highest number of Holocaust survivors anywhere in the world, outside of Israel. In addition, it includes the largest number of orthodox Jewish individuals of any Council District and has the most yeshivas and synagogues of any District in New York City. Most residents of the 44th Council District have unique cultural, ethnic, and religious similarities that are not shared by other districts. Sadly, a significant portion of the proposed 44th Council District was changed to cut out tens of thousands of orthodox Jews and their institutions in the Midwood area.

By moving the eastern border of the district from Ocean Ave to Coney Island Ave, a large section of Midwood would be moved to the 45th Council District, where those individuals would have little in common culturally or ethnically with their new district. This is also true by moving the district line above Avenue I, from Ocean Parkway to McDonald Ave. These proposed changes fail to keep "communities of interest" together, to the detriment of both residents in the 44th and 45th Districts.

An interesting fact about the proposed map, the last four Council Members to represent this district, would no longer live in the district as it is currently drawn. As a former City Council Member, this very peculiar change impacts me personally. From the day I was born up until this very moment, I have lived in the 44th Council District. The 44th Council District is where I grew up, it is where my family lived, it is where my father's synagogue was located, it is where I went to school, and it is where I raised my children. Strangely, under the proposed maps, I have been cut out of the 44th Council District.

I am certain that this error was not done on purpose or for political reasons, it was merely an oversight to remove several blocks between McDonald Ave and Ocean Parkway, which happened to include my residence and cut me out of a district I have lived in my entire life. I urge the commission to consider restoring the blocks that were removed above Avenue N, between McDonald Ave and Ocean Parkway. Obviously, all political maps are oddly shaped, but the decision to cut out these specific blocks make this district particularly oddly shaped.

In addition, I also urge the commission to return the Midwood neighborhood to the 44th Council District by adjusting the eastern boundary of the proposed district between Avenue I and Avenue N, and moving the district line between those streets from Coney Island to Nostrand Avenue. In exchange, sections of Gravesend can be removed from the proposed district to keep the population at the appropriate number. I strongly believe my suggested changes would better serve to keep "communities of interest" together and safeguard 44th Council District's effective representation.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my written comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Simcha Felder". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Simcha Felder
Senator, S.D. 17