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August 19, 2022

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

Dear Chair Walcott,

As an elected public official representing parts of Harlem and as a proud native Harlemiter, I am writing to express my deep concerns over the drawing of the 2022 City Council District lines and to firmly say Harlem's City Council lines must not be disturbed in any way that would hinder or weaken Black representation in New York City. In other words, "Hands Off Harlem!"

Harlem's importance as a mecca of Black culture and excellence cannot be understated. For over a century, Harlem has attained global recognition for its many artistic, social, sports, and political contributions, boasting some of New York City and the world's greatest and most well known Black institutions. These achievements occurred despite massive outside efforts to undermine and erase the political and economic progress of Black New Yorkers over the decades, including the destruction of thriving Black neighborhoods like Seneca Village and San Juan Hill, and the long lasting effects of redlining and the War on Drugs.

Since 2014, the Village of Harlem is the only area of Manhattan with Black representation in the New York City Council. Shifting the lines without recognizing the impact it will have on historically Black areas has the very real possibility of erasing Black representation at the city level at a time when more and more Black Manhattanites are being forced out of their homes due to skyrocketing housing prices and gentrification. Given Harlem's significant racial and historic characteristics, I respectfully request that the New York City Districting Commission reviews current and proposed maps and puts forth a final map that will not thwart or further erode Black representation in Manhattan, especially when Harlem remains the only area in the borough with a Black City Council representative.

New York City's Charter mandates "fair and effective representation" of racial groups protected by the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Redistricting should strengthen Black communities like Harlem that have long been marginalized, and should not result in the restriction or lessening of Black political power. Avoiding the loss of Black representation in New York County and keeping communities of interest together is absolutely critical. If the lines are not drawn in a way that recognizes Harlem's history, the latest map will undermine Harlem's political, racial and cultural composition, which will almost certainly lead to a complete loss of Black representation in the City Council in Manhattan. I strongly urge the New York City Districting Commission to reject any plans that threaten Harlem's existence as a historically Black community and further diminish Black political power in the borough of Manhattan.

Respectfully Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Al Taylor', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Al Taylor  
Member of Assembly, 71st AD