



Jennifer J. Raab, President

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY DISTRICTING COMMISSION
AUGUST 22, 2022**

Good evening. My name is Jennifer Raab, and I have the great honor to serve as President of Hunter College where, since our founding 152 years ago, we have helped the American dream come true for thousands of striving students. Our commitment to excellence and equity is historic. Since our founding, we have admitted students of every race and ethnicity, a rarity in the 1870s, held them to high standards and sent them out to live our motto “Mihi Cura Futuri - The Care of the Future is Mine.”

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding Hunter’s concern about the proposed changes in New York City Council lines in the Upper East Side community Hunter has called home for generations.

Our first objection to the new lines results from the proposed division of our main campus - which houses an academic community of over twenty-four thousand students, faculty, staff and community auditors - into two different council districts. The blocks between 68th and 69th Street and Lexington and Park Avenue are our historic home. Just three years after its founding, in 1873, Hunter College established its footprint on the Upper East Side with a magnificent Romanesque red brick structure on Park Avenue between 68th and 69th Street. When it was destroyed by fire, Mayor LaGuardia petitioned FDR for WPA funds to rebuild on the site of the landmarked Art Moderne building we still use today. The gothic castle structure facing Lexington Avenue and adjoining this building was completed in 1914 for the renowned Hunter High School and is occupied by the college today. During World War II, FDR transferred his family’s 65th Street townhouse between Madison and Park to Hunter, further cementing our ties to the community. And then in the 1970s, as the college exponentially expanded its enrollment, we ventured further east and south by acquiring both the South East and West corners of 68th and Lexington. The fiscal crisis delayed until the 1980s the construction of what are now known as our East and West buildings and the iconic bridges that connect them over Lexington Avenue. Our most recent expansion of what we affectionately call our “œvertical urban campus” occurred in 2012 when we purchased the landmark now known as the Baker Theatre Building on 67th Street directly East of Lexington Avenue.

These five buildings that comprise the main Hunter campus are connected - above or below ground. And they are connected as well to the historic 1918 subway station with Hunter College inscribed in the traditional mosaic tiles with entrances on both sides of Lexington Avenue.

Hunter College is deeply troubled that pursuant to the proposed district lines Hunter’s main campus, at 68th Street and Lexington Avenue - which was recently named Audre Lorde Way by the Council - would be separated into two different council districts. Our famous Lexington Avenue skybridge,

West and East buildings, but between the proposed Council Districts 4 and 5 as well. The East Building and Baker Building would be in District 5 as would the uptown platform of the 68th Street Lexington line. The West Building as well as our two historic buildings on Park and Lexington Avenues between 68th and 69th Street would be in District 4.

Hunter College believes strongly that our main campus constitutes a distinct community of interest that must be kept intact in the final redistricting process.

The proposal to divide our campus would violate four of the criteria set forth in City Charter Section 52 (1) (c) (d) and (e) and Section 52 (2). The violation of those criteria results in districts where:

- neighborhoods and communities of interest are not kept intact,
- the proposed district is not compact,
- the proposed district results in an extreme crossover district, and
- the proposed district is very oddly shaped.

We love our iconic bridge spanning Lexington Avenue. But frankly, turning it into a bridge between council districts is simply a bridge too far.

Our second objection to the proposed City Council Redistricting concerns the placement of Hunter College's two newest and easternmost Manhattan properties in a new District 26, which primarily covers Queens. Specifically, Hunter College owns the fourth floor of the Belfer Building, Weill Cornell's transformative research building on 69th Street east of First Avenue. Twelve top Hunter researchers have their labs in this building. This is a physical expression of a long-standing relationship between the two institutions that will advance scientific study and train the next generation of scientists.

In addition, Hunter owns a foundation on which we plan to build a new Nursing and Science Building connected to the David H. Koch Center for Cancer Care at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center on 74th Street and York Avenue.

According to the preliminary draft map, these two vital extensions of Hunter's main campus would be drawn into Queens Council District 26, which establishes a new crossover district between Queens and Manhattan for the first time since the Council was expanded to 51 members. This proposal would force an impractical and uncomfortable connection between the important East Side Medical and Science Research Corridor - of which Hunter is an important participant - and a predominantly Queens district which has its own unique needs and priorities. We strongly believe that Hunter belongs in this important Medical and Science corridor, and that this Medical and Science corridor needs to be represented in the Council from within the borough of Manhattan.

Hunter is part of a multi-institutional partnership with Weill Cornell, Memorial Sloan Kettering, the Hospital for Special Surgery, and New York-Presbyterian. Together we have created the NIH-funded Clinical and Translational Science Center, a model consortium accelerating clinical and community applications of basic scientific discoveries. It is crucial that we have the future opportunity to build on these significant partnerships, and seek new ones, within in a single council

district in which an elected representative can advocate, guide and help us through often challenging government issues.

The practical difficulties of having a two-borough, Queens-Manhattan district cannot be ignored; therefore, Hunter strongly opposes moving the Upper East Side Medical and Science Research Corridor, a powerhouse in the biomedical research sector of which we are proud to be part, into Queens.

The City Charter stipulates that the preservation of communities of interest is a criterion that the Districting Commission must consider: “District lines shall keep intact neighborhoods and communities with established ties of common interest and association, whether historical, racial, economic, ethnic, religious or other.” We believe that the current proposal ignores the established ties between Hunter College and our partnering institutions in the Upper East Side Medical Research Corridor as well as unnecessarily splits our main campus into two districts. The Commission must consider both these points as echoed by the resolutions of Manhattan Community Board 6 and 8 and the community at large.

For all these reasons, Hunter College urges the Commission not to adopt the currently proposed lines for Manhattan Districts 4 and 5 as well as Queens District 26 in the next iteration of maps.

We appreciate the Commission’s willingness to consider all these issues as it continues the redistricting process outlined by the Charter. We ask that you embrace the Hunter motto and care for our future in Manhattan by keeping Hunter within its historic neighborhood and partnership community.

Thank you for considering our concerns.