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To: Public Testimony
Subject: Written testimony of Councilman Justin Brannan

Monday, August 22, 2022

NYC Districting Commission
253 Broadway, 3rd Floor
New York, NY 10007

Chair Walcott and Members of the NYC Districting Commission,

I represent Council District 43 covering the southwest Brooklyn neighborhoods of Bay Ridge, Dyker Heights, parts of Bath Beach, and Bensonhurst. This is where I was born and raised. I was first elected in 2017 and am now serving in my second term. I'm privileged to serve as Chair of the Finance Committee and as a member of Council's senior leadership team.

It is an objective fact that the first round of maps presented by the NYC Districting Commission divided historic communities of interest – especially in southern Brooklyn. Here in Brooklyn, we like our pizza cut into slices, not our Council Districts. If you combine Council Districts 43 and 38, you will divide them. I hope this Commission will agree that pitting communities of interest against another and wiping out hard-fought gains that have existed for a generation is not the path forward.

I'm lucky to represent an ever-growing Asian constituency and I appreciate the push to create a new majority Asian council district; however, this could be accomplished without turning southern Brooklyn completely upside down by blindly slicing us up into a million puzzling pieces. Creating any new district should not require pitting immigrant communities against each other. A new district in southern Brooklyn must not lead to the dissolution of Red Hook and Sunset Park in District 38 while slicing up Dyker Heights in District 43 as an afterthought or collateral damage.

With a little more effort, patience, and precision, this Commission could create a majority AAPI district without extinguishing the voting power of historically Latino communities. And in these two maps, you will see how it could be done:

- Southern Brooklyn proposed map 1: <https://districtr.org/plan/136695>
- Southern Brooklyn proposed map 2: <https://districtr.org/plan/136694>

As public servants, it is imperative we listen to the people. These new boundaries cannot be drawn in secret silos with mandates from people with PhDs living in other states. We are a city of communities. We are neighborhoods, not puzzle pieces. We share parks and houses of worship. We share schools and stores. Together, we sit on stoops and complain about the subways. A computer program must not blindly separate us based on data; these decisions require a human understanding of communities. Could a computer program tell you that in Bay Ridge I represent one of the largest and oldest Muslim communities in the United States? Could an out-of-state academic look at a map and

know that I also represent an emerging community in Bath Beach known as Little Guatemala? Of course not.

The priority of this Commission must be to maintain the existing cohesion of historic communities of interest while preserving both emerging and enduring ethnic and religious enclaves. Furthermore, Council Districts must overlap and track with other existing relevant city agency boundaries. Apolitical city agency boundaries such as school districts, community boards, police precincts, and sanitation garages make sense. These borders exist for a reason, and they should guide this Commission.

As a Councilman, the lion's share of my job is to ensure city agencies are tending to the needs of my district. It is also my responsibility to allocate a finite amount of funding. It would be incredibly challenging to do this if my Council District included 170,000 people across 4 different police precincts, 5 sanitation garages, and 6 different neighborhoods.

Maintaining deep rooted and long-standing communities of interest together in the same council districts should be your north star. Please listen to the people not the computer programs. We know what we're talking about.

Sincerely,

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