



SCIENCE FOR THE BENEFIT OF HUMANITY

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August 22, 2022

Dennis M. Walcott  
Chair, NYC Districting Commission  
253 Broadway, 4th Floor  
New York, NY 10007

Dear Commissioner Walcott,

On behalf of The Rockefeller University on Manhattan's Upper East Side, I am writing in opposition to that portion of the proposed redistricting plan that would shift more than 50 city blocks and approximately 50,000 residents from Council District 5 in Manhattan to Council District 26 in Queens.

As you know, the NYC Redistricting Commission is obligated to redraw district boundaries based on requirements set by law. One of the primary requirements is to keep neighborhoods and communities of interest intact, meaning communities with established ties of common interest and association. Long-time community interests and associations, largely rooted in the geographical contiguity of the island of Manhattan, are clearly violated by the proposed redistricting plan. This plan appears to run counter to stated requirements and logic.

In the proposed redistricting plan, the East River would separate York Avenue and part of First Avenue of our Upper East Side neighborhood from the rest of our community that historically has extended from the East River (including Roosevelt Island) to Second Avenue in the southern section and Lexington Avenue in the northern section, and will instead link us to the bulk of the newly delineated Council District 26 in Queens across the river. We are concerned that projects that are critical to the culture of innovation and collaboration that the nationally acclaimed educational and research institutions located in on the Upper East Side may not be understood or appreciated in a district that primarily serves Queens. We fear our long-standing involvement in cooperative initiatives with and for the benefit of our Manhattan neighbors, intimately supported by established relationships with the office of Council District 5 would be disrupted, even ended. By way of example, we began a partnership with then Council Member Ben Kallos during his first month in office that resulted in Rockefeller University spending over \$15 million on the section of the East River Esplanade alongside our campus. This included major repairs to the storm-damaged seawall; a complete refurbishment of the esplanade landscaping, biking and walking lanes with new pavers, benches and water fountains; and the establishment of an endowment fund of \$1 million to maintain the landscaping in perpetuity. The design of the refurbished esplanade included charette sessions with members of the public and in cooperation with Community Board 8. The results have been so well-received that the same design is being used for subsequent sections of the esplanade to

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the north and south. More recently, we've partnered with current District 5 Council Member Julie Menin to address the community's concerns about security on the esplanade by coordinating efforts to manage homeless encampments and add security camera coverage. We've also been supported by CM Menin in efforts to reduce the (significant) impact on the local community of the city's infrastructure (water and gas lines) that has been taking place on multiple city blocks along York Avenue for over 6 years with no end in sight. It is not clear that the Council member for a majority-Queens Council district would adequately and effectively represent our collective interests.

We also have concerns about other aspects of the proposed redistricting plan, including that the newly proposed district would not be compact by legal definition and, as a result of being bifurcated by the East River, would be oddly shaped, again by legal definition.

Thank you for your attention to our concerns about the proposed redistricting plan. If you would like to discuss these issues further, I would welcome the opportunity to speak with you

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Richard P. Lifton".

Richard P. Lifton, M.D., Ph.D.  
President  
The Rockefeller University