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THE COUNCIL
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TWIN PARKS CITYWIDE TASKFORCE ON FIRE

PREVENTION

Chair Dennis Walcott
New York City Districting Commission

Thank you to the Commission for the opportunity to testify and thank you for your service to our City. I know this has not been an easy task, and I deeply appreciate the work you all have put into making this process as open and accessible as possible.

My name is Alexa Avilés, I serve as the current Council Member for District 38 which includes the neighborhoods of Red Hook, Sunset Park, Greenwood Heights and portions of Windsor Terrace, Dyker Heights, and Boro Park. I have lived in this district for over 20 years and am a lifelong Brooklynite.

As you may have seen in the media, and I'm sure have already heard (and will continue to hear over the next days and weeks) from residents of our district, many of us were shocked, dismayed and fervently opposed to the preliminary maps.

Our community has shifted over the years. Nonetheless, the current District 38 was created by the 1989 Charter Revision Commission with a Latino plurality to ensure this community would be kept whole and could elect candidates of their choice. Prior to the 2020 Census, Hispanics were the plurality in the combined Sunset Park-Red Hook district. Over the past three decades, our community has included a longstanding and growing Arabic-speaking population and even larger and growing Asian community. All of our communities are diverse within and of themselves. Cantonese was once the majority language of the 8th Avenue Chinese community, while today, Mandarin serves as the lingua franca and Fujianese speakers represent a growing share of the population.

Sunset Park has always prided itself on being a community where people from all over the world have come to establish themselves. These days, you can attend our annual Puerto Rican Parade, find the best tacos, and sample spectacular hot pot and dim sum all within a few blocks of each other.

While it is true that there are cultural and political differences across our district's neighborhoods, there is so much that unites us. Just take a walk in Sunset Park or stop by the ballfields near the Red Hook Rec Center. You will see the joy in our diversity.

The proposed plan takes a sledgehammer to our district in three critical ways:

- 1) It step ladders through the heart of Sunset Park, dividing the community in two, zigzagging in an illogical manner as follows:
 - 3 blocks down 4 Avenue
 - 8 blocks down 5 Avenue
 - 7 blocks down 6 Avenue
 - 7 blocks down 7 Avenue

This step-laddering boundary removes from District 38 an important landmark, the Basilica of Our Lady of Perpetual Help that conducts services in three languages. The Basilica is an important faith institution in our community, a school and place where so many community members receive needed services.

The zigzagging nature of the initial proposal also divides our 5th Avenue Business Improvement District between two districts, breaking up its continuity.

It creates an untenable situation in which every several blocks, representation can change. How can you plan for a community that way? Land use decisions become even more challenging than they already are.

- 2) Removing Red Hook from Sunset Park is a major break. These communities have a long-shared history stretching over a half century, when Puerto Ricans first came to work in garment factories and other industries along the waterfront. Many of our families have traversed both neighborhoods and have maintained those connections over decades. Pushing Red Hook into District 39 pushes them into a majority White district.
- 3) Combining what is left of Sunset with Bay Ridge is the icing on the cake that would turn this once majority communities of color district and turn it into a White plurality district. This flies in the face of the Voting Rights Act and breaks up longstanding ethnic and racial, socio-economic communities of interest.

I support the proposed unity maps created by a coalition of Black, Asian and Latino organizations, and they will be submitting updated maps that take into consideration much of what has been discussed at the hearings so far. These proposed maps meet the spirit of the law, they were done in cooperation between communities and organizations, and they support the opportunity to create an Asian district that the community desperately needs without disenfranchising other communities.

This Commission should consider whether a majority Asian district or two plurality Asian districts in South Brooklyn is appropriate and clearly communicate the rationale behind your decision to all stakeholders.

I implore this Commission to keep Sunset Park whole, to protect Latino voices, and to preserve the core of District 38. Do not destroy the work we have done to make this community our common home. We have spent decades building bridges across our differences, and we have much work to do still. We have other good options, I ask you to use them.

Thank you,



Council Member
Alexa Avilés
District 38