



PUBLIC ADVOCATE FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Jumaane D. Williams

**TESTIMONY OF PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS
TO THE NEW YORK CITY REDISTRICTING COMMISSION
Aug 21, 2022**

My name is Jumaane D. Williams and I am the Public Advocate for the City of New York. I appreciate the opportunity to deliver testimony at this important hearing.

I would like to start by repeating what I stated in last year's New York State Redistricting hearings hosted by the Independent Redistricting Commission (IRC): since the Reconstruction era, gerrymandering has minimized the impact of the votes of people of more color. Through "cracking", which intentionally spreads voters of more color out amongst multiple districts in order to dilute their political voice, and "packing", which intentionally concentrates voters of more color into one district in order to restrict their influence.

The drawing of districts has been a harmful political tool. District lines that ignore local neighborhood boundaries can result in elected representation that is not reflective of community priorities or demographics. It is vital that representation in our local municipal districts is reflective of our neighborhoods and communities. Moreover, it is important that communities of interest remain or are consolidated together.

We have a once-in-a-decade opportunity to draw lines. We must use it to ensure fair and accurate representation for all New Yorkers. This should also prioritize the people who have experienced the most marginalization from this process in the past. All New Yorkers should have an opportunity to play their part in voicing concerns and hearing from leaders about this process. Transparency is key in alleviating the harms I mentioned today. Transparency, along with accountability and adequate feedback from the public will be key to the success in making our communities not only feel seen and heard, but also in ensuring representation reflects the diversity of the realities of our neighborhoods.

Here are some of my concerns based on my office's outreach to community residents and advocates:



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- In Brooklyn, the waterfront communities from Red Hook south to Coney Island are currently the most impacted by the proposed lines. It is important to do additional outreach and listen to residents to determine which are the communities of interest and then work to keep those communities intact;
- In Queens, Council District (CD) 26 is crossing the East River into Manhattan and removing Roosevelt Island along with several dozen square blocks up to First Avenue from the 50's to the 80's from a Manhattan district and transferring it to the Queens district. These are Manhattan communities, physically located on the island of Manhattan or Roosevelt Island that is part of Manhattan;
- In Manhattan's Harlem community there are several blocks that are being removed from CD9 (the Harlem district) and being placed into CD8 (the East Harlem district). We have seen the removal of the Black base from home for far too long, we have to make sure that does not continue. Traditionally historic black communities and its institutions should be kept intact within the Harlem district including the Africa Center formerly known as the Museum of African Art that has now been drawn into the East Harlem district;
- Staten Island is being kept whole, although there is a -4% population disparity;
- The Unity Map, the AAPI residents, and activists are advocating for AAPI communities of interests in NYC—particularly in Queens and in Brooklyn:
 - In Brooklyn, they are advocating for a Bensonhurst district with a majority AAPI community. Currently, Bensonhurst and the AAPI community is split over several districts, with CD43, the former Bensonhurst district, being composed of four different council districts. It is important to listen to the voices of the AAPI and advocates on this matter; and
 - In Queens, the advocates state that the Unity Map best represents as a whole the 16 Asian American communities of interest that exist.

If changes are not considered in these districts, then the Commission would be splitting up communities of interest.

Additionally, my office was informed that there was a lack of engagement of the communities located in CD 16 and 17. Again, more opportunities should be given to communities to evaluate proposed changes in the Council district lines. Many of these same communities were recently tossed back and forth and in new state senatorial and congressional districts.



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Lastly, I want to express concerns about CD45, which I represented for many years. The proposed lines would include 50 - 75 square blocks from CD44, the neighboring district. My knowledge of the district leads me to have concerns whether some of all of these square blocks are communities of interest in CD44.

I want to thank the commission for your anticipated assistance in addressing matters raised during these hearings. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J.D. Williams".

Jumaane D. Williams

Public Advocate for the City of New York