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44TH DISTRICT

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September 7, 2022

Hon. Dennis M. Walcott
Chairman
New York City Districting Commission
253 Broadway, 3rd Floor
New York, New York 10007

Dear Chairman Walcott,

I write to add my voice to that of Sen. Simcha Felder, as articulated in his letter to you of August 18, 2022. I urge you to include Midwood in the 44th Council District, beyond the Coney Island Avenue border as drawn in your draft map.

I will not echo all of Sen. Felder's points, but I write to emphasize that if the draft map were adopted, it will have a devastating effect on the representative needs of New York's Orthodox Jewish community and the potential for Orthodox Jewish representation in the City Council.

Some historical perspective is necessary: When the City Council was expanded and the 45th Council District was first drawn to create an opportunity to elect the Council's second Caribbean-American representative, the district did not go west beyond Nostrand Avenue (south of the LIRR cut), except for two streets: East 28th and 29th Streets, from Avenues J to L. Otherwise, the 45th District was broadly Flatbush and East Flatbush.

Successive Districting Commissions have pushed the 45th District's western border further into Midwood, each time bringing in thousands of Orthodox Jewish residents who had either lived in the 48th or 44th Districts. The current draft map completely divides Orthodox Midwood along Coney Island Avenue, with the eastern portion of Midwood now being anchored to an East Flatbush council district. As Sen. Felder pointed out, it is not irrelevant that the draft map has the residences of all four representatives of the 44th District now in the 45th District.

The 45th District was first represented by one of only two Orthodox Jews in the City Council (the other being the representative from the 44th District). In 1993, the incumbent, who had served in the pre-expanded Council, chose to not seek re-election to this geographically smaller and now majority Caribbean-American district. The district's residents elected its first Caribbean-American representative in the Council, the Rev. Lloyd Henry, for whom I worked from 1994-1996. Each of Councilman Henry's successors have appropriately been from the



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Caribbean-American community, giving a growing community their deserved representation in the Council.

At the same time, the 44th Council District has become the city's only majority Orthodox district, with the inclusion of Midwood. The result has been a cohesive, intact community of common interest and association, represented mostly by the same legislators in Albany and the City Council, the same two police precincts, sanitation districts and community boards.

The majority of children living in the 44th District receive a yeshiva education, as did their parents. They have, not coincidentally, been represented by yeshiva-educated representatives in the Council, Assembly and Senate. The 44th District is home to scores of yeshivas, hundreds of synagogues, dozens of rabbinical colleges, and New York City's only Orthodox university outside of Manhattan (and, parenthetically, relatively few public schools). Under the draft map, this Orthodox university, together with hundreds of synagogues, yeshivas and rabbinical colleges will be attached to a district anchored in East Flatbush. This simply makes no sense.

There exists little to no commonality of interest and association between East Flatbush and the neighborhoods west of Nostrand Avenue. I am loath to speak to the needs of neighborhoods that did not elect me, but it is not unknown that much of the 45th District has very specific and dire needs on issues like education, public safety, healthcare, development and housing, just to name a few – which are substantially and substantively different from the needs and aspirations of the residents of the 44th District.

This is not to say that legislators cannot serve diverse populations with different needs. In fact, some of the representatives of the 45th District, including the current representative, have been stellar and caring in their service to the entirety of the populations they serve. But it makes more sense to follow the guide of the Charter, in keeping neighborhoods of commonality together. This allows legislators to craft policies that speak for the broad majorities of their neighbors, particularly where the needs are divergent from next-door neighborhoods.

Additionally, if the suggestions of Councilwoman Farah Louis, Sen. Felder, myself and others are followed, more of the Orthodox portions of Community Board 14 would be served by the representative from the Orthodox neighborhoods of that Community Board. As an 18-year member of Community Board 14 preceding my election to the Council, I have seen Orthodox representation on that Community Board diminish over time, to the point where the Midwood portion of the Community Board barely has representation. As Community Boards play a



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significant role in service delivery, neighborhood planning and zoning, it is so necessary that the boards representing Orthodox neighborhoods have representation reflective of the population.

I suggest that the portions of Gravesend that have been added to the 44th District by your draft be removed, to allow for Midwood to be restored and grown. I urge you to pay great heed to the suggestions of Councilwoman Louis, Sen. Felder and others, particularly in the restoration of Midwood to the 44th Council District. My suggestion is that Midwood be added to the 44th Council District, through Avenue O and Nostrand Avenue, and that Gravesend be removed, except as currently exists. This will have the effect of connecting the great bulk of the Borough Park and Midwood Orthodox communities into a single cohesive neighborhood with great commonality of interest and association.

With respect for your service and for your time in reading my comments, I am,

Most sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kalman Yeger", with a long, sweeping flourish at the end.

KALMAN YEGER
New York City Councilman