

JAMES F. GENNARO

NYC COUNCIL MEMBER, 24TH DISTRICT, QUEENS

September 28, 2022

TO: The NYC Districting Commission

ATTN: Dennis Walcott, Chair

ATTN: Dr. John Flateau, Executive Director

Dear Commissioners:

I write to you with regard to the need for the Orthodox Jewish Community to remain whole within the 24th Council District. I could make a detailed case why it is imperative that this be accomplished, and to rail against the thinking that led the Commission to divide this community in both the original district proposal and in the proposal that was voted down by the Commission on September 22, but the case I would make citing the criteria that the Commission is compelled to follow in configuring districts, including preserving established communities of common interest, would largely mirror the enclosed joint statement on this matter by the Executive Vice President of the New York Board of Rabbis, Rabbi Joseph Potasnik, and the President of the Queens Jewish Community Council, Michael Nussbaum. The joint statement by Rabbi Potasnik and Mr. Nussbaum has been independently submitted by them to the Commission earlier today. I will simply associate myself with their remarks (included in this submission for your convenience), as they make an excellent case for the need for the Orthodox Jewish Community within the 24th Council District – the largest Jewish voice in Queens -- to remain intact (instead of divided) and thereby not be disenfranchised. Their joint statement is worthy of all due consideration by the Commission, and I hope and expect that it will be given such consideration. The consideration of their statement is a necessary prerequisite to understand the rationale for the proposal I advance in this letter.

It is important to note that in addition to the comments I have enclosed by Rabbi Potasnik and Mr. Nussbaum, countless Jewish constituents of mine, including Rabbis and Jewish Community leaders, have voiced their legitimate objections to the splitting of the Jewish Community in the original draft of the lines, and voiced objections today (the first day after the Rosh Hashanah holiday) regarding the September 22 version of the lines, which also divides the Jewish Community. The release of the September 22 lines immediately before the Jewish Sabbath and the Rosh Hashanah holiday afforded the Orthodox Jewish Community only ONE day – today – to voice their objections to the September 22 lines. That is most and regrettable and unfair to that community.

I believe that the best use of my comments today is to propose a solution to the Commission as to how the Orthodox Jewish Community can be made whole by shifting population from two areas between District 24 and District 23. I have discussed this proposal with Redistricting Commission Member Maf Uddin of Queens, and while I do not speak for Commissioner Uddin, he has indicated to me his support for it, and he expressed to me that he has requested the Executive Director of the Commission to put this proposal on the docket for consideration by the full Commission in its deliberations commencing tomorrow, September 29. I thank Commissioner Uddin for his understanding of the legitimate concerns of the Orthodox Jewish Community in District 24, and for his good vision and dedicated work to empower the South Asian Community, for whom he

has long been a champion, and which this proposal also seeks to advance (the empowerment of the South Asian Community).

I will mention anecdotally that in 1990 and 1991, I served as the City Council's liaison to the City's first Redistricting Commission, in which the Council was expanded from 35 Districts to the current 51 member configuration, so I have experience and some acumen in drawing Council Districts and a detailed knowledge of the criteria set forth in the City Charter regarding redistricting.

PROPOSAL:

In my opinion, the simplest way to remedy this matter is illustrated in the enclosed map. I apologize for its crude, handmade quality. To make the Orthodox Community whole again in the 24th District would require the proposed district boundary (represented by the solid lines) in the northeast part of the 24th District to revert to the current 24th District boundary (represented by the dotted lines). This would require the population of that area (3,888 people) to be put BACK into the 24th District, where it has always been, from the 23rd District, where it is proposed to be moved in the new districting plan.

To BALANCE such a population transfer back to the 24th District, there must be a transfer of equal population from the 24th District (as proposed in the new district configuration released last week) to the 23rd District.

The obvious way to accomplish that would be to transfer the area highlighted on the attached map that was just added in last week's districting proposal to the southern border of the 24th District. This area is bounded by Hillside Avenue on the north, Jamaica Avenue on the south, 178th Street on the West, and 182nd Street on the east. This area contains 3,855 people (an essentially equal number of people transferred in the Hillcrest/Fresh Meadows area). This area has NEVER been part of the 24th District before.

Further, this area shares a border with the 23rd District as proposed by the September 22 lines, which in last week's districting proposal the 23rd District was expanded to pick up the area from 188th Street west to 182nd Street between Hillside Avenue and Jamaica Avenue. The expansion of the 23rd District west from 188th Street to 182nd Street helps to make the 23rd District more of a South Asian (especially Bangladeshi) influence district. And the addition of the segment from 182nd Street west to 178th Street which I am proposing makes the 23rd District even MORE of a Bangladeshi-influence district. (The 24th District has long been a very strong Bangladeshi-influence district.)

So, the ultimate result of what I propose with this population transfer in the northeast corner of the 24th District and the transfer on the south border of the 24th District would be to:

- Fully address the legitimate concern of the Orthodox Jewish Community to remain undivided as they have been since that religious minority Community was established 70 years ago by re-establishing the District borders of the current 24th District in that area, and;
- Help to create a stronger Bangladeshi-influence district in the 23rd Council District, and;
- The population numbers for both the 24th District and the 23rd District would remain essentially equal to what it was (in the September 22 version of the lines) before both of these population transfers.

I hope this proposal which fully remedies the unfair disenfranchisement of the Orthodox Community in the 24th District caused by the Redistricting Commission's decision to split it -- AND provides real benefits to the Bangladeshi Community by expanding its influence in the 23rd District -- meets with the Commission's approval, and I thank Commissioner Uddin for putting this proposal on the docket for the Commission and for voicing his support for it to me. I am available at the Commission's convenience to answer any questions or address any concerns the Commission may have regarding this proposal. I can be reached at 646-298-4861. Thank you for your kind consideration of this proposal.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Gennaro". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jim Gennaro

cc: Commissioner Maf Uddin

Enclosures: Joint QJCC and NY Board of Rabbis Letter
District 24 Map