

THE COUNCIL
OF
THE CITY OF NEW YORK
CITY HALL
NEW YORK, NY 10007

JOSEPH C. BORELLI
MINORITY LEADER

July 7, 2022

The Hon. Dennis Walcott
Chair
New York City Districting Commission
253 Broadway
New York, NY 10007

Dear Chairman and New York City Districting Commission Members:

As elected officials representing Staten Island, we are asking that you do everything in your power to keep Staten Island's three City Council Districts – Districts 49, 50 and 51 – entirely within the borough as you draw new City Council maps.

Chapter 2A, Section 52 of the New York City Charter, which sets forth criteria for the “district plan” the decennial Districting Commission must follow, provides explicit instructions for the Commission to keep “communities of interest” together: “District lines shall keep intact neighborhoods and communities with established ties of common interest and association, whether historical, racial, economic, ethnic, religious or other.” Furthermore, the Charter states that a “district shall not cross borough or county boundaries” nor shall it be “drawn for the purpose of separating geographic concentrations of voters enrolled in the same political party into two or more districts in order to diminish the effective representation of such voters.”

This language makes it abundantly clear that splitting one of the aforementioned City Council Districts between Staten Island and Brooklyn or Staten Island and Manhattan would violate both the spirit and intent of the City Charter by breaking up a community of interest.

A 102-square-mile island three times the size of Manhattan, but with less than one-third its population, Staten Island is very distinct from other boroughs in New York City. This starts with the fact that the only way to get to Staten Island is by bridge or boat, because we are the only borough without a subway system connecting us to the rest of the city. This “disconnectedness” has created a unique culture and imbued its residents with a strong sense of social, geographic and political independence.

Staten Island is by far the most suburban borough, with more acres of parks and open spaces than any other in the City. A majority of our residents - 69 percent – own their homes, while more than three quarters of residents in Brooklyn and Manhattan, our closest neighbors, are renters. More than 83 percent of Staten Island households have cars, most of them more than one. In Brooklyn and Manhattan, where there are an abundance of public transportation options, only 40 percent and 22 percent of households own cars, respectively. In Brooklyn and Manhattan, more than 70 percent of registered voters are Democrats and less than 9 percent are Republicans. Staten Island is much more politically and ideologically diverse, with 41 percent of voters registered as Democrats, 31 percent as Republicans and the remaining split between third parties and independents.

Because of these conditions, residents across the three City Council Districts of Staten Island have much more in common with each other than they do with residents of other boroughs, especially when it comes to concerns about city policy. These concerns transcend ideology, racial and ethnic identity and political boundaries. We care much more about property taxes and water bills, about the cost of tolls and state of our roads than others who do not directly pay property taxes, nor drive cars. Due to our varied geography and built environment, ranging from dense high-rises to sprawling suburban homes and beachfront bungalows, we have very different infrastructure and public safety needs. Because of our diverse political ideologies, we often disagree strongly with our fellow New Yorkers on legislative and budgetary issues.

This is why political representation that is entirely from Staten Island matters so much. Splitting one of Council Districts with another borough will not only dilute Staten Islanders' votes, it will stifle Staten Island's distinctive voice in the City Council. We ask that you preserve that voice.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

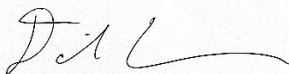
Very truly yours,



Joseph C. Borelli
Minority Leader, 51st District



Kamillah Hanks
Council Member, 49th District



David Carr
Council Member, 50th District

CC: John Flateau, Executive Director
Yovan Samuel Collado
Hon. Marilyn D. Go
Kevin John Hanratty
Maria Mateo, Esq.
Joshua Schneps
Lisa Sorin
Msgr. Kevin Sullivan
Kai-Ki Wong
Maf Misbah Uddin
Michael Schnall
Kristin Johnson
Gregory W. Kirschenbaum
Marc Wurzel
Dr. Darrin K. Porcher