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THE COUNCIL
OF
THE CITY OF NEW YORK
SELVENA N. BROOKS-POWERS
MAJORITY WHIP
31ST DISTRICT, QUEENS

ROCKAWAY OFFICE
1931 MOTT AVENUE, SUITE 410
FAR ROCKAWAY, NY 11691

TEL: (718) 471-7014
FAX: (718) 327-4794

LAURELTON OFFICE
222-02 MERRICK BLVD.
LAURELTON, NY 11413

TEL: (718) 527-4356
FAX: (718) 527-4402

CITY HALL OFFICE
250 BROADWAY, SUITE 1865
NEW YORK, NY 10007

TEL: (212) 788-7216
FAX: (212) 227-1210

July 12, 2022

Mr. Dennis Walcott
Chair
NYC Districting Commission
253 Broadway, 3rd Floor
New York, NY 10007

Dear Chairman Walcott,

Thank you once again for the opportunity to testify before the New York City Districting Commission on behalf of my constituency. As a follow up, I wanted to formally submit my remarks, which can be found attached, separately.

Should you or members of the Commission have any follow up questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to me directly at sbrooks-powers@council.nyc.gov or (646) 891-7069.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Selvena N. Brooks-Powers".

Selvena N. Brooks-Powers
NYC Council Majority Whip
District 31, Queens

Testimony by NYC Council Majority Whip Selvena N. Brooks-Powers
June 28, 2022
York College, Jamaica, NY

Good afternoon. It is good to be here at Southeast Queens' premier higher institution, York College.

I am proud to see how many have come out tonight to speak in support of their communities. It is extremely crucial that we engage the public in this process, so thank you to Commissioner Walcott and the entire Districting Commission for holding this and many other public meetings.

The way we draw our districts is fundamental to our democracy. The shape of our districts plays a part in who we choose to represent us, which in turn affects how government addresses every issue we face. So it's important that we get these lines right, and create district maps that best serve the needs and interests of communities all across the City.

It is especially important that we protect the voting power of marginalized communities. I am a lifelong resident of Southeast Queens and eastern Rockaway, which I now represent in the City Council.

From Laurelton's tree lined streets on 225th Street to Seagirt Boulevard's ocean views, to our thriving small business corridors on Beach 20th Street and Merrick Boulevard, Council District 31 is a microcosm of New York City.

Southeast Queens is predominantly Black and includes many members of the Caribbean diaspora. Communities like Arverne by the Sea, established in the early nineties, helped to create generational wealth for many young black homeowners. Unique to Southeast Queens, many neighborhoods in District 31 have created a pathway to homeownership for many black and brown homeowners.

Our neighborhoods are incredibly diverse, but we are united through our shared commitment to our community. We have a very active and vibrant network of civic groups, full of people who are truly invested in doing what is best for their neighborhoods.

Although New York State has steadily lost population in recent decades, our district has grown, gaining approximately 13,000 new residents in the last 10 years. This may have a significant impact on the placement of our next district lines, so as the Commission works to produce new maps, I urge you to consider the following realities in my district.

Our communities have suffered during the COVID-19 pandemic — Far Rockaway was the second deadliest zip code at the height of the first wave — but we have remained resilient and continue to fight for issues critical to us. From the dire need for emergency healthcare to keeping Jamaica Bay free of illegal dumping and better infrastructure for our streets, District 31 speaks with a united voice. Our communities share similar topography, socioeconomic status and interests.

Not only that, but our communities are contiguous. Our shoreline withstood years of coastal erosion. From Superstorm Sandy to Hurricane Ida, Council District 31 residents share a continued commitment to advocate for innovative policies and infrastructure to

protect the vital New York coastline.

Environmental stalwarts like the Eastern Queens Alliance, led by Ms. Barbara Brown, fight to maintain my district's ecological gem, Jamaica Bay. Their commitment to environmental stewardship paired with my advocacy ensured that we created the beautiful Idlewild Park Preserve Environmental Science Learning Center.

We also have active civic groups that keep our residents connected and invested in our neighborhoods. From the Federated Blocks of Laurelton to Rosedale Civic Association, these groups are an unwavering voice that speak to the evolving needs of our residents. Altering district lines will disrupt the fabric of our communities, misaligning conflicting interests and undermining this community's resounding voice.

I am also proud to represent parts of JFK. The JFK Redevelopment Project is a profoundly valuable economic driver in District 31, with an estimated 10,000 jobs in development. Reinvesting in the people and businesses of Council District 31 will not only ensure the success of the redevelopment, but will maintain the quality of life for residents in Southeast Queens. As such, JFK should remain in the district, so that my constituents continue to have direct access to employment opportunities.

Our community deserves a unified voice in government. Diluting our voting power across districts would weaken that voice. It would alter the representation we see in our government, and threaten our ability to advocate for ourselves and address the issues we face. As you all work to produce our new maps, I urge the Commission not to break up these strong minority communities. We cannot let our voices be stifled. We need districts that keep our communities together, so that we can continue to stand together on the issues that matter most. Our neighbors are counting on each other to keep showing up and fighting for all of the issues that matter to us. That is why it's so critical that we keep these neighborhoods together.

I urge the Commission to keep these pressing needs in mind as they continue their important work. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Selvena N. Brooks-Powers', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Selvena N. Brooks-Powers
New York City Council Majority Whip
Queens, District 31