



Testimony of Councilmember Crystal Hudson

New York City Districting Commission

Dennis M. Walcott, Chair

May 26, 2022, 3pm

Good afternoon,

My name is Crystal Hudson, and I am the New York City Council Member for the 35th District, which encompasses the neighborhoods of Crown Heights, Prospect Heights, Fort Greene, Clinton Hill, and Bedford-Stuyvesant.

Thank you to Chair Walcott and the New York City Districting Commission for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding the Commission's upcoming work in drafting a new districting plan for New York City Council districts.

I am a third-generation Brooklynite and the daughter and granddaughter of Jamaican and Honduran immigrants. I was the only child of a single mother, who served as a nurse for more than 30 years at Harlem Hospital and raised me in the same Prospect Heights community her father laid roots in when he immigrated from Jamaica in the 1940s. I now live in the home my mother worked hard to buy thirty years ago, and I have now planted roots of my own right here in Central Brooklyn.

My story is not unique. The 35th District is home to many folks like me from various backgrounds – from multi-generational Caribbean immigrant families and the Lubavitch community in Crown Heights and Bedford-Stuyvesant to long-time Black American families in Fort Greene, Clinton Hill, and Prospect Heights – all of whom have deep ties to these communities. More than 14,000 of these residents live at the five NYCHA developments in the district: Atlantic Terminal, Lafayette Gardens, Ingersoll Houses, Farragut Houses, and Walt Whitman Houses — the last three of which used to be one development called Fort Greene Houses. These developments serve as much of the cultural fabric of the 35th District. In the advent of mutual aid during the global COVID-19 pandemic, they are now spaces where folks from diverse backgrounds join together in community, serving the community, and connecting so many people from across the 35th District.

These folks are the reason the 35th District is so special. They're also the Black retail owners and restaurateurs who set up shop along Fulton Street, Myrtle Avenue, Washington Avenue, Franklin Avenue, Nostrand Avenue and more; the families that come out every year to the West Indian Day Parade along Eastern Parkway; and the ones who come out in droves each year to the Brooklyn Academy of Music to enjoy Dance Africa. Our district is also home to newer, predominantly white Brooklynites who want to plant roots in a diverse community and contribute



to its growth and prosperity. Diversity and history – in particular Black history and culture – is what makes the 35th District so unique.

At its core are the historically Black neighborhoods of Crown Heights, Prospect Heights, Fort Greene, Clinton Hill and Bedford-Stuyvesant. In fact, the entirety of District 35 was once predominantly Black. But over the past two decades, gentrification has overwhelmed our district. With an influx of new homeowners who purchase brownstones from Black and brown families who can no longer afford the costs associated with increased property taxes, overall maintenance and upkeep of owning historic homes, and simply living in the neighborhood, we have seen longtime Black residents pushed out. New residential developments have also gone up throughout the district, with taller luxury buildings replacing older buildings and commercial property, and providing housing options for wealthier residents as our district's affordable housing options remain woefully inadequate. As a result, we have more people moving into our district who are typically whiter and wealthier while we have seen longtime residents of color forced out of their homes. And with one of the highest eviction rates in Brooklyn – at 92.4 per 10,000 residents in Crown Heights South compared to 5 per 10,000 in Park Slope/Gowanus – we have quite literally seen folks forced out of the very neighborhoods they were raised in, set roots in, raised their own families in, and started businesses in.

As the Commission considers new boundaries for councilmanic districts, I urge you to prioritize the needs of the very communities that have never been prioritized before and ensure Central Brooklyn retains its unique characteristic as home to a myriad of Brooklynites from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds as it has for generations. This councilmanic district has been home to the West Indian American Day Parade since the 1930s and the Chabad headquarters since 1940. Our community is centered around numerous iconic community and cultural destinations – from Fort Greene Park in Fort Greene to the Brooklyn Museum in Prospect Heights to Medgar Evers College in Crown Heights. These hubs serve the numerous communities I represent and provide unique community services from recreation to culture to education. Thankfully, the 35th District has a population deviation under 5 percent under the current lines and should not need to see radical changes to its boundaries to fit the charter-required deviation requirement.

Above all, we must ensure that Flatbush Ave remains the western boundary of my district as has historically been the case. To move any district boundaries across this de-facto highway will only separate communities of interest and prevent the cohesion of a unified district that has been standing together for generations.

I urge you to ensure the 35th Council District retains the diversity and community hubs that our residents pride themselves on.

Thank you.