

Zaki Isaac B. Tamir – Chairman
Yossi Hackner – Vice Chairman & Secretary
Fishel Brownstein – Treasurer

392 Kingston Avenue • Brooklyn, New York 11225
Tel.: (718) 771-9000 • Fax: (718) 778-0272

387 Kingston Avenue • Brooklyn, New York 11225
Tel.: (718) 778-8808 • Fax: (718) 774-7540

Rabbi Eli Cohen – Executive Director

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Testimony for Submission to the New York City Redistricting Commission

Via email: PublicTestimony@redistricting.nyc.gov

Crown Heights Jewish Community Council is a representative organization of the over 70 Jewish congregations of the Crown Heights neighborhood and surrounding areas in Central Brooklyn.

We submit this testimony on behalf of this community of common interest that has historically seen its voice diminished by having its members split into four separate City Council Districts.

The Community

The attached map (and accompanying spreadsheet of EDs) delineates where the bulk of our growing community resides – spanning W-E Rogers to Rochester Avenues and from Sterling Place in the north to Clarkson Avenue in the south. The map also indicates the location of synagogues and the Jewish schools attended by virtually all of the children in the community. According to the ACS, among the 90,000 residents there are approximately 6,000 White Nonhispanic households comprising over 23,000 individuals within the defined area – 17.6% of the households and 27% of the total population.

The vast majority of these White residents in this area are affiliated, in some form or other, with the Chabad Lubavitch movement, centered at the main Lubavitch Synagogue at 770 Eastern Parkway. On several occasions during the past few years, 15,000 adherents have met to pray and celebrate together in outdoor gatherings on Eastern Parkway. On the High Holidays, many come by foot to the main synagogue for the ceremony of casting away the sins. Year-round, they meet for prayer in 70+ affiliated smaller congregations that meet in synagogues, schools, storefronts and private homes scattered throughout the area, as shown on the map attached to this testimony. Their over 5,000 school-age children mostly attend 12 religious day schools scattered throughout the neighborhood (also shown on the map.) Their observance of the kosher dietary laws dictates that they shop for the most part in the 8 kosher groceries and supermarkets in the neighborhood. They join each other's life cycle celebrations at 10 venues in the community, and they accompany the departed to their final resting place from in front of the main synagogue. The extent of their

common interest in terms of social ties, participating daily in community religious and family life-cycle events, makes this community one of the most unified in NY City.

Current Districting

As stated, this community is now split into three districts, 35, 40 and 41 (plus a couple of blocks of 36). The boundary lines of three of those districts meet in a T at the community's heart, at the corner of Kingston Avenue and Empire Boulevard, its major shopping streets. This is a clear violation of criteria C, mandated by the City Charter that, "communities with established ties of common interest and association" should be kept intact.

Furthermore, the current districts spread out great distances from that corner, with the 35th district stretching almost four miles north to the foot of the Manhattan Bridge; the 40th District extending over 3 miles through Crown Heights, East Flatbush, Prospect Lefferts Gardens and to the South end of Kensington; and the 41st District sweeping around to include pieces of Bedford-Stuyvesant, Ocean Hill, Brownsville and Crown Heights, that have very little similarity to each other. In addition, each of the current districts sees its representative serving residents of 5 separate Community Districts, and five separate police precincts, limiting their participation in local meetings.

The New Proposed District

We are proposing a new, compact (i.e., "no more than twice as long as it is wide") district to be formed in Central Brooklyn:

- that would be no more than 1.5 to 2 miles long or wide and that would conform to all the guidelines mandated by the NY City Charter in all of its provisions as detailed below;
- this District could be designed to be almost fully contained within the boundaries of Brooklyn Community Districts 8 and 9 and would be adjusted to contain the approximate population number required by the City Charter;
- a critical component of this district would contain the entire population of the Chabad-Lubavitch Chassidic community, whose members worship at the 70+ congregations affiliated with our Council.

As detailed on the attached map, the total population of this core area would be slightly over 90,000, which could then be augmented with additional census tracts as would be dictated by the boundaries of adjoining tracts to reach the required population total of a Council District.

The compliance with the third priority of the City charter that we are demanding can be accomplished without falling foul of the higher priority provision to "ensure[s] the fair and effective representation of the racial and language minority groups in New York city which are protected by the United States voting rights act" since almost any compact district that would be drawn around this core to include the necessary total population would be 70% African American.

Furthermore, it is well known that, through the work of our Council and others, the Chassidic community of Crown Heights and the neighboring Black and particularly the Caribbean

community, have developed a close civic relationship, with strong religious ties and values, which make them also a more natural fit to be included together in one Council district, spanning most of Community Districts 8 and 9.

Sincerely,



Rabbi Eli Cohen
Executive Director