



July 7, 2022

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

Re: Testimony re: the 2023 Redistricting Process

Commissioner Walcott:

My name is Crystal Hudson, and I am the New York City Council Member for Brooklyn's 35th District, which encompasses the neighborhoods of Prospect Heights, Fort Greene, Clinton Hill, and parts of Crown Heights and Bedford-Stuyvesant. Thank you to Chair Walcott, Executive Director Dr. Flateau, and the New York City Districting Commission for the opportunity to provide testimony. I previously submitted testimony in May and gave oral testimony in June in which I explained my connection to this district. The testimony I've submitted here incorporates my previous testimony and augments it.

District History

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. In the advent of mutual aid during the global COVID-19 pandemic, they are now spaces where folks from diverse backgrounds join together to be in community and serve one another in myriad ways. These developments serve as much of the cultural fabric of the 35th District.



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.

We also have 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. In addition to BAM and its host of performing arts facilities, families of all backgrounds pay regular visits to the Brooklyn Museum, the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, the Jewish Children’s Museum, Mark Morris Dance Center, Theatre for a New Audience, and so many other smaller performing arts spaces and artistic hubs. It is these people and cultural institutions that are the reason the 35th District is so special.

Recent Demographic Trends

At the core of the 35th District are the historically Black neighborhoods of Crown Heights, Prospect Heights, Fort Greene, and Clinton Hill, as well as a small portion of 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. According to recent Census data, my district saw a 20% drop in its Black population between 2010 and 2020.

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.

Proposal for 2023 Maps

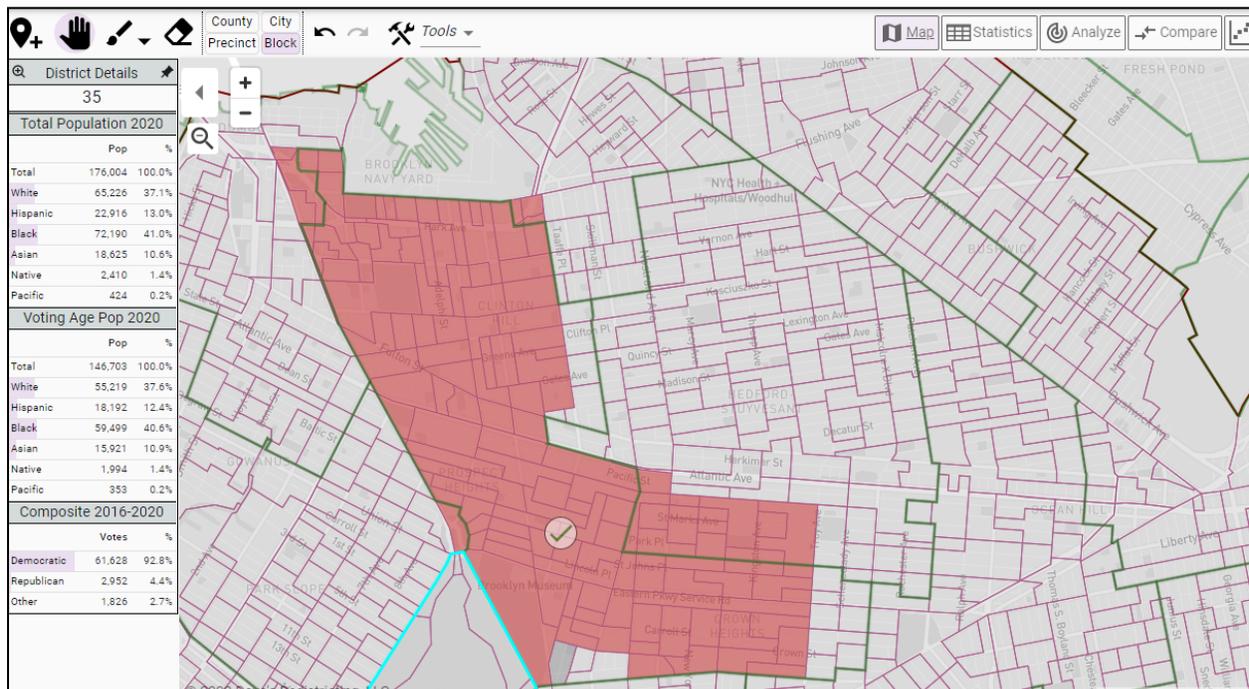
As the Commission considers new boundaries for councilmanic districts, I urge you to prioritize the needs of the very communities that have never been prioritized before and ensure Central Brooklyn retains its unique characteristic as home to a myriad of Brooklynites from diverse racial



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 current district 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 – and these hubs serve the numerous communities of the 35th District and provide unique community services, from recreation to culture to education. Thankfully, the 35th District has a population deviation under 5 percent with the current lines and should not need to see radical changes to its boundaries to fit the charter-required deviation requirement.

Potential New Boundaries

That said, I understand all district lines may need to change to accommodate the charter’s mandate and the population changes in adjacent districts, including the 33rd District which has a population deviation of 20.3% and the 40th District which has a population deviation of -10.1%. As such, I am submitting a proposed map for the 35th District that has a population as close to the ideal population of 172,631 as possible. (You can find the map at this link and below: <https://bit.ly/CD35ProposedMap>.) This proposed district will ensure communities of interest remain in-tact; provide “fair and effective representation” of racial and language minority groups; provide opportunities for a reduction in over-populated districts and addition in under-populated ones; and is compact & contiguous — all characteristics mandated by the City Charter.





As drawn, this new district will remove parts of Bedford-Stuyvesant that can be incorporated into the 36th District (-2.9% deviation), removes southern parts of the district near Prospect Lefferts Garden that can be incorporated in the 40th (-10.1% deviation) and 41st (-5.5% deviation) Districts, and adds a few blocks from the 33rd District (+20.3% deviation) on the north side of the district.

I created this map with a few major considerations in mind:

- **Ensuring Neighborhoods Remain Whole:** The Commission must ensure Prospect Heights remains whole and in one Councilmanic district. Since the Congressional and Assembly lines have split Prospect Heights among two districts and removed them from the seats that have historically represented the neighborhood, we must ensure Prospect Heights is represented at the local level as one neighborhood so its needs are not diluted across two districts. Prospect Heights is among the smallest neighborhoods in Brooklyn and has been fighting numerous local issues together — from advocating against Atlantic Yards to fighting for open streets along Vanderbilt Ave. and Underhill Ave. As such, it needs and deserves unified representation in one Council District. This proposal also keeps Fort Greene and Clinton Hill in one Council district while putting most of Crown Heights in the 35th as well.
- **Combining Crown Heights North & South:** It is crucial to provide greater, unified representation for Crown Heights, a historically disinvested community that is home to longtime Black homeowners and renters. The Commission should not split Crown Heights along Eastern Parkway because there is more poverty in Crown Heights South, and there could be the unintended consequence of creating an impoverished region separated from wealthier parts of the neighborhood.
- **Consolidating Councilmanic Districts By Community District:** Currently, many Council districts overlap with multiple Community Districts. Currently, the 35th District includes parts of Community Boards 2, 3, 8, and 9. As such, this map removes as much of Community District 3 as possible from the new 35th District and consolidates portions of Community District 8 to ensure each Community Board has unified, strong representation.
- **Strengthening Caribbean Community:** The Commission should ensure the Caribbean diaspora remains unified in representation in these new maps by consolidating Crown Heights North and South, as I propose.
- **Keeping Black and Lubavitch Communities Together:** Since the August 1991 Crown Heights Riot, the Black and Lubavitch communities have worked tirelessly to not only coexist but bolster one another in Crown Heights. From annual events like One Crown Heights to local community safety councils to the Crown Heights Coalition, local leaders have made significant inroads in supporting these communities and working toward mutual respect and tolerance. As such, the Commission should ensure these two communities remain unified in the 35th Councilmanic district.



- **Representing Cultural Institutions:** As currently drawn, the 35th District is the cultural hub of Brooklyn, home to everything from the Brooklyn Museum to the Brooklyn Botanic Garden to the Brooklyn Academy of Music. As such, I propose adding the Brooklyn Children's Museum to the 35th District to ensure all cultural institutions are strongly represented in a single district.

If you have questions or would like to discuss my proposal further, you may reach out to Andrew Wright, Director of Policy & Budget Initiatives, at anwright@council.nyc.gov or 718-260-9191. Thank you in advance for your work and consideration of my proposal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "C. Hudson".

Crystal Hudson
Council Member, District 35