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Community Board 11 Testimony for the NYC Districting Commission October 4, 2012

Community Board 11 represents the Manhattan neighborhood of East Harlem. The community of East Harlem has historically had a distinct identity, which has been created through generations of cultural development and preservation. With a predominantly Latino and African-American constituency, Community Board 11 residents share many of the same hopes and concerns.

Still a relatively low-income community, households in Community Board 11 have a median income of \$30,759. 52% of working age residents are either unemployed or not in the labor force and 32% of residents are living below the Federal poverty level.¹

Affordable housing is essential to almost all our residents, with 93.7% of all rental units rent-stabilized.² While East Harlem has a large housing stock of affordable housing, much of it is in danger of being deregulated due to the rapid gentrification of our community. The Regional Plan Association conducted a study in 2011 of expiring rent-regulated buildings and found 12,500 units may become deregulated within the next 30 years (or 31.7% of the entire housing stock).

Our children struggle to succeed in our public schools with only 38.8% of students performing at grade level in Reading and 50.9% performing at grade level in Math.³ A disproportionate amount of youth in East Harlem live in poverty, with 42.5% of residents under the age of 18 years having lived below the poverty level within the last 12 months.⁴

Residents of East Harlem share many of the same burdens and have similar needs. Thus we require distinct representation at City Council. Many of our residents have expressed concern that our community will be split between two City Council districts and constitute a minority of the population of both Council District 8 and 9 in the preliminary draft City Council map. To appropriately represent the common needs of our community, it is vital that East Harlem constitute the majority of at least one Council District, as it currently does and has in the past.

¹ 2006-2010 American Community Survey 5 Year Estimates, PUMA 03804, New York

² "New York City's Housing and Neighborhoods", Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy – NYU, 2011, p. 100

³ Ibid, p. 100

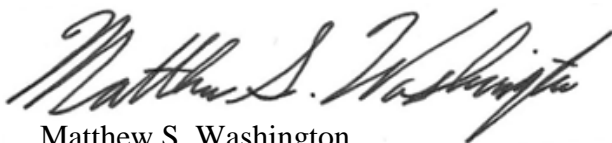
⁴ 2006-2010 American Community Survey 5 Year Estimates, PUMA 03804, New York

This is also important for those Bronx residents that will find themselves incorporated into the proposed 8th Council District, as they have unique needs that must be represented at City Council, which often differ from the needs of East Harlem. While both communities have lower income populations, East Harlem is experiencing rapid development and gentrification and needs council representation that can balance growth and ensure it benefits all community residents.

Community residents have also expressed concern regarding the exclusion of Randall's Island from the 8th Council District. The residents of East Harlem are among the most active users of the parkland and facilities located on Randall's Island, including much of the programming offered by the Randall's Island Parks Alliance. Students from several East Harlem public schools utilize Randall's Island regularly. Randall's Island is also a part of Community Board 11. Our Community Board reviews and comments on new proposals or improvements to public parkland on Randall's Island and provides East Harlem residents an opportunity to participate in the review process. Randall's Island also has two pedestrian footbridges that physically connect to East Harlem, allowing local resident easy access to the public spaces found there. The connection between East Harlem and Randall's Island is the strongest of any adjacent community and therefore it must remain in the Council District that represents East Harlem.

Finally, La Marqueta, which is found underneath the Metro North Railroad on Park Avenue between East 116th Street and East 113th Street, has been placed in the 9th Council District in the preliminary draft City Council map. La Marqueta has always been associated with the historic neighborhood of Spanish Harlem/El Barrio, now represented through the 8th Council District. The cultural connection between this historic market and the Puerto Rican community found in East Harlem dates back many decades. Recent work to revive La Marqueta has brought hope to many local residents that the old glory of the market can be recaptured. Community residents have expressed a desire to have the market remain a part of the 8th Council District to maintain its connection to the Puerto Rican community in East Harlem.

We look forward to reviewing the Districting Commission's updated maps that will hopefully include our community situated in the majority of at least one council district, and include both Randall's Island and La Marqueta in the 8th Council District.



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