

## Testimony of A. Mychal Johnson

My name is Arthur Mychal Johnson. I am a resident of the Mott Haven neighborhood in the South Bronx and a member of Community Board 1. I am here to give testimony to implore the New York City Redistricting Commission to reconsider and correct the potentially devastating effects on the South Bronx of the proposed December 4<sup>th</sup> Revised Plan.

After consultation with many of my colleagues in the Bronx and Manhattan, I have carefully prepared a revised plan, entitled the Common Sense Bronx Plan, to ensure fair and effective representation of the South Bronx, keep intact communities of interest in the South Bronx and ensure compact and contiguous districts.

1) Population: The December 4<sup>th</sup> Revised Plan reduces population values in Bronx Districts 16, 17 and 18 in a haphazard carve out to inflate the population in District 8 to the maximum possible deviation of 4.99%. Population deviations should be as minimal as possible to achieve the least amount of impact to racial and language minority groups and their historic political representation. The Common Sense Bronx Plan equalizes the population distribution among Districts 8, 16, 17 and 18, with a maximum deviation of 1.4% among all four districts.

2) Fair and Effective Representation and Communities of Interest: The December 4<sup>th</sup> Revised Plan dramatically disrupts the fair and effective representation of certain communities of interest in particular. Approximately 9,000 African Americans are cut out of District 16; 6,000 African Americans are cut out of District 17; and the African American population in District 8 is arbitrarily increased despite the district's 65% Hispanic majority. I urge you to carefully reconsider disrupting this historically important community of interest and reflect on the very foundation of the Voting Rights Act. The Common Sense Bronx Plan more carefully balances population distribution among the Bronx districts to preserve fair and effective representation while maintaining below standard deviations as well as ideal population values in surrounding districts.

3) Compactness: The hasty redrawing of District 8 in the December 4<sup>th</sup> Revised Plan stretches from 59<sup>th</sup> Street in Manhattan to 166<sup>th</sup> Street in the Bronx, making District 8 a staggering 107 blocks long, five times the width of the district at its widest point. The Common Sense Bronx Plan further reduces the length of District 8 by scaling back illogical boundaries to the north to make the district more compact while maintaining below standard deviations as well as ideal population values in surrounding districts.

4) Contiguity: Finally, and most importantly, the December 4<sup>th</sup> Revised Plan continues to strip Randall's Island from District 8 and arbitrarily assign it to Queen's District 22. Randall's Island is and has historically been connected to the Bronx and Manhattan. The island is in a Bronx assembly district and is part of Community Board 11 in Manhattan. There is no association with Queens, nor has there ever been. There are four bridges from the Bronx and Manhattan to Randall's Island whereas Queens only has one. Our children need and deserve access to that open space, particularly when our community faces asthma rates at 8 times the national average, and this will not be prioritized if the recreational island is given over to Queens. The Common Sense Bronx Plan reincorporates Randall's Island into District 8 while maintaining below standard deviations as well as ideal population values in surrounding districts.

5) Communities of Interest: One of the criteria for districting is keeping intact neighborhoods and communities with established ties of common interest and association. The South Bronx

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waterfront is lined with a publicly-owned 96 acre parcel of land called the Harlem River Rail Yards. The December 4<sup>th</sup> Revised Plan continues to slice in half this critical waterfront property and divide it between two different city council districts, and this is unacceptable. The South Bronx waterfront is crucial to the district's short, medium and long-term development, and the community surrounding this land has for decades been united in common interest around its usage. For more than 10 years, the South Bronx has struggled for and recently achieved the Randall's Island Connector, a footbridge from the Bronx to Randall's Island that crosses over a narrow waterway separating our residents from 480 acres of green space. As currently configured in the December 4<sup>th</sup> Revised Plan, tens of thousands of South Bronx residents that are within a one mile walking distance to the connector would have to cross district lines to access the footbridge despite a decade of having worked together for its completion. The Common Sense Bronx Plan corrects this obvious error and keeps in tact the South Bronx waterfront while maintaining below standard deviations as well as ideal population values in surrounding districts.

6) Communities of Interest: Another area of common interest and association which has been arbitrarily stripped away from Mott Haven and Port Morris in the December 4<sup>th</sup> Revised Plan is the central business district of the South Bronx, known as the HUB, which is centered at 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue and 149<sup>th</sup> Street. In its hasty effort to make District 8 take up a greater percentage of the Bronx, the commission seemed to carefully carve out the economic foundation of the neighborhood. As one of the poorest districts in New York City, residents of the South Bronx are more than anything an economic community of interest. The Common Sense Bronx Plan places the South Bronx tax revenue base back into District 8 while maintaining below standard deviations as well as ideal population values in surrounding districts.

For these and other key issues with the December 4<sup>th</sup> Revised Plan, I urge you to reconsider the lines you have drawn for District 8. This is one of most important and potentially harmful structural changes to one of the cities most long neglected areas.