

City Redistricting Hearing Testimony

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My name is Daniel Marks Cohen, and I am the New York State Democratic Committeeman representing the 69th Assembly District of Manhattan's Upper West Side in the New York State Democratic Committee. The Assemblymember for the 69th is Daniel O'Donnell. I am a lifelong resident of the Upper West Side, my parents live in the district, my wife and I live in the district, and we are raising our newborn son – a third generation West Sider – in it as well.

The part of the Upper West Side I live in – between 96th Street and 125th Street, is the poorest portion of the 69th Assembly District (<http://zipskinny.com/zipcompare.php>), it is the least served in terms of services and transportation (<http://www.straphangers.org/pokeyaward/10/>), and has more crime (http://www.nyc.gov/html/nypd/html/crime_prevention/crime_statistics.shtml).

I believe at least one reason for its consistent and uneven status is that fact that the 69th is cut up into multiple pieces of nine different districts. This was somewhat improved recently by the passage of federal redistricting legislation which redrew the TWO Congressional districts: the 8th by Representative Jerry Nadler, and the 15th by Representative Charlie Rangel; but it was made worse by the THREE State Senate districts: Tom Duane of the 29th, Bill Perkins of the 30th and Adriano Espaillat of the 31st. The latter, the 31st, is particularly egregious, stretching from 184th to 24th Streets along the west coast of Manhattan island, it looks more like the Latin American country of Chile than a proper State Senate district. But sadly, that it not your purview today, and we are stuck with this absurd district for the next ten years.

What is the Commission's charge is the City Council lines, so now we turn to look at the districts there: there are FOUR City Council districts in the 69th: Gale Brewer of the 6th, Robert Jackson of the 7th, Melissa Mark-Viverito of the 8th and Inez Dickens of the 9th. Including Assemblymember O'Donnell makes it TEN different elected officials representing one community at three different levels of government, it is no wonder that people get confused about whom to talk to about one issue or another. And it lets elected officials off the hook with matters that are at the fringes of their district; or issues that are of uncertain origin in one district or another; or overlapping district issues. What is clear here is that if everyone – all ten electeds – are to be responsible, **then no one is truly responsible**. This lack of clarity needs to be addressed, and we can correct one issue, the appropriate councilmanic location of Manhattan Valley – which is the area from 96th Street to 110th Street, east of Broadway to Central Park West.

Let's look more closely at the City Council districts: if you were to stand at 96th Street and Broadway, depending on what corner you are on, you could be in one of three different councilmanic districts. There will always be confusion at the edges of districts and with the 6th district entirely south of 96th Street represented by Ms. Brewer, that demarcation line is clear. But north of there it gets confusing, depending on which side of Broadway you stand, you could

be in the 8th district represented by Ms. Mark-Viverito to the East or the 9th district represented by Ms. Dickens to the West. Both councilmembers are dedicated and hardworking, so this is not a criticism of their individual work ethic. However, it may be time to reconsider the lines of these two members in Manhattan Valley – particularly the 8th district – which stretches all the way over from East Harlem to Manhattan’s West Side. For constituents with limited mobility or restricted incomes, travelling to 116th Street and Lexington Avenue to the council district office is a great difficulty. Ms. Mark-Viverito does her best with limited resources and extended staff, but it is hard to meet the needs of such a widely disparate 8th district, both geographically and economically.

Perhaps when Ms. Mark-Viverito’s late predecessor, Philip Reed, represented the district -- and full disclosure, I was Phil’s treasurer in his final re-election campaign – there may have been some justification in keeping Manhattan Valley in the 8th, since Phil lived in Manhattan Valley and to redraw the area out of the district would have drawn Phil’s home out of the district as well. But that is no longer the case – Ms. Mark-Viverito lives on the East Side of Manhattan, and the bulk of her district is there as well. I propose that the Commission redraw the lines more naturally, to keep Manhattan Valley’s representation on the West Side, where it belongs, rather than as an appendage to another district for incumbency or demographic reasons.

I will close on this point – just shy of fifty years ago in 1963 the community board lines were drawn to map out constituencies, neighborhoods, and communities with similar needs and demands (http://www.nyc.gov/html/cau/downloads/pdf/community_board_basics.pdf). While the people within those lines have changed over time, the lines themselves are still true. If the Commission is looking for a guide to what districts should look like I urge them to compare their lines to the lines of the community boards. The closer to those community board lines the election districts are drawn, the happier their constituents will likely be. Thank you for your time and consideration.