**Make the Road New York Testimony**

**New York Redistricting Commission**

**November 22, 2021**

Good Afternoon. My name is Rodman Serrano. I am the Long Island Organizer at Make the Road New York, the largest grassroots organization of immigrants and working-class people of color in New York. We operate community centers in Brentwood, Long Island; Jackson Heights, Queens; Bushwick, Brooklyn; Port Richmond, Staten Island; and White Plains, Westchester. Our 24,000 members build the power of our communities to achieve dignity and justice through organizing, policy innovation, transformative education, and survival services. I submit this testimony to share the organization’s perspective on redistricting.

Increasing civic engagement is a critical part of our work. We conduct outreach continuously to ensure community members’ voices are heard. In last year’s census, we led in-person, phone, and digital outreach that reached hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers. Our members participated in that process to make certain that our communities receive both adequate resources *and representation*. Now, to achieve such representation, we need a redistricting process that is transparent, fair, and reflects the geographic realities and growing numbers of our communities.

During the first round of hearings, we presented several priorities for this process, rooted in federal standards, widely-accepted best practices, *and* our experience in the state’s last round of redistricting. Particularly in the last State Senate map, communities of color were effectively disenfranchised--both through “cracking” on Long Island and through high population deviations that concentrated more voters in New York City communities with high Black, brown, and immigrant populations. Our members and allies organized to stop this injustice, but those in power ignored us.

We are deeply disappointed in the failure of the commission to produce a single set of maps. This failure has left us with little confidence that the IRC will produce a final single set of maps, which would render the commission an abject failure and signal the need for future redistricting reform. Despite our warranted pessimism about this process, we continue to urge this body to ensure that people of color are represented in the process by:

1. Respecting one person, one vote;
2. Refraining from abusive line-drawing, especially “cracking” and “packing”;
3. Respecting political subdivisions and communities of interest, especially for long-underrepresented immigrant, Black, and brown communities;
4. Ensuring compactness and contiguity; and
5. Prioritizing public participation and transparency.

We also urge the Commission to deliver the representation that the growing Latinx community merits. Our community has grown by more than 33 percent across Long Island since 2010. We deserve more representation.

As it relates to the proposed maps for Long Island, we urge the Commission to focus on fixing the “cracking” of communities of color in previous maps—especially for the State Senate, where it has been rife. Overall on Long Island, the Letters map creates two Senate districts where residents of color are a majority—which is better than the one such district in the Names map.

In Suffolk County, it is crucial to stop the cracking of the greater Brentwood area (Brentwood, Central Islip, and North Bay Shore), where we operate a community center and have a high density of members. We appreciate that the Letters map keeps these communities together. In contrast, the Names map seeks to maintain the cracking of communities of color in this area, which was a grave problem in the last round of redistricting and must not be repeated.

In Nassau County, it is imperative to avoid the cracking of communities of color, as well. Westbury and New Cassel should be kept whole and together. Freeport should be kept whole. Hempstead should be kept whole. And Elmont should be kept whole—and not in majority-Queens districts, where multiple Names and Letters proposals put it.

We urge you to take seriously the input of community members and organizations--especially those in historically underrepresented communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Please contact me at rodman.serrano@maketheroadny.org if you have any questions.