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Greetings Commissioners of the Independent Redistricting Commission of New York and thank you for providing this opportunity to testify. Redistricting is a critical component of our democracy that determines the political representation of New Yorkers for the next 10 years and as we know historically members of marginalized communities have been excluded and disenfranchised by this often-partisan political process making our participation in this process crucial.

My name is Cesar Z. Ruiz, I am an EqualJustice Works legal fellow with LatinoJustice PRLDEF sponsored by the Lavan-Harris family, working on the New York Redistricting legal team. LatinoJustice PRLDEF is a Latinx civil rights organization that works to create a more just society by using and challenging the rule of law to secure transformative, equitable and accessible justice, by empowering our community and by fostering leadership through advocacy and education. We have participated in New York State redistricting in the past several decades advocating for equitable representation of the Latinx community and endeavor in that effort once again this cycle.

As a part of the Unity Coalition, we have been working alongside Medgar Evers Center for Law and Social Justice (CLSJ) and the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF) to produce maps that reflect our collective community members' interest. We have recently submitted our state senate and assembly coalition maps and urge the commissioners to review the decisions made by us as a collective in those efforts to ensure equitable representations of our communities across New York city. We are tirelessly working to submit congressional maps for your consideration and hope to have those soon for your review as well.

Over the past 10 years the Latinx community in New York has continued its steady growth comprising around 28% of New York city's total population, 19% of the state's total population and 15% of the state's electorate yet, we lack meaningful representation across the state of New York in congressional and state legislative bodies. I appear here today urging the commission recognize the need to draw these lines to ensure that the Latinx community is rightfully accounted for by enabling access to Latinx candidates of choice that represent their community's interests and needs which historically has not been the case. The need now more than ever to recognize this growth and repair past harms falls upon the commission with the power to rectify past misgivings, the hope is that you take decisive action to support what the numbers inevitably show.

As it pertains to the Latinx community in Manhattan we want to take some time to highlight important communities of interest that we urge the commission to be mindful of as they draft their lines. Latinx communities of interest in Manhattan include Hamilton Heights, Washington Heights, and East Harlem. These areas have historically been home to high proportions of Latinx community members and continue to be so based on current census data.

Furthermore, Latinx community members in these communities each undoubtedly share many common social and economic interests making it imperative that they be kept whole to ensure that they have access to equitable representation. Dividing these communities will irreparably harm their prospects for electing officials that represent their communities' interest in contravention of the various existing constitutional protections in place to protect that interest which is why I take this moment to share our suggestions.

In the existing New York State Senate District 31 we urge the commission to not divide Hamilton Heights. Particularly, we in our Unity Coalition maps are suggesting that the commission maintain a boundary line closer towards West 125th/135th street which ensures the Hamilton Heights community is kept whole (See SD 23-UM). On the state assembly level, we similarly urge the commission to protect these communities of interest by keeping it whole to the extent possible.

In existing Senate District 29 we also find it important to keep the East Harlem community whole to ensure equitable representation of Latinx community members there. (See SD 24-UM). We are also suggesting that the commission take existing Senate District 29 out of the Upper Westside of Manhattan. We suggest this to help remedy past issues Latinx community members have faced in dilution of their representation due to incompatible communities being paired together in the district. Specifically, in existing Senate District 29 community members of the Upper West-side of Manhattan are paired with East Harlem/the Bronx community residents when these communities in fact share very little in common. Given that these communities do not tend to share common social and economic interests we suggest that the lines of existing Senate District 29 be shifted to reflect the lived realities of each of these communities. (See SD 24-UM). These areas are of significance to our community and for that reason we take time to highlight the changes we suggest.

As a general matter on the congressional level, we do not believe that downstate New York and New York city residents should bear the brunt of the loss of a congressional seat given its consistent growth over the past 10 years. I suggest that the commission shift the burden of that loss to communities where the growth was lacking over the past 10 years. For far too long apportionment has been wielded as a tool to distort political representation of communities of color in the 5 boroughs and this can no longer be the case. With the Unity coalition congressional maps forthcoming I urge the commission to review those suggestions in reference to what we believe is an equitable representation of congressional districts for our communities of interest.

Thank you once again to the Commissioners for taking time to listen. I greatly appreciate the opportunity to stand before you and advocate for my community and hope that you may take into consideration all that I have presented for you today. As advocates we work tirelessly to ensure this process is reflective of our community's needs and realities, I hope and have confidence that you will join us in that endeavor. Wishing you all a happy, healthy and safe holiday season.