**REDISTRICTING STATEMENT: Bronx, NY Virtual Testimony**

**Leslie Peterson**

**November 9, 2021**

Good afternoon, Commissioners and fellow citizens. My name is Leslie Peterson and I am a native New Yorker and current 35-year resident of Co-op City in the Bronx. I appreciate the opportunity to deliver my testimony. I am desirous of having the distinguished members of the Independent Redistricting Commission understand the importance of keeping Congressional District 16, covering the Northern Bronx (Co-op City) and the Southern half of Westchester County, including the cities of Mount Vernon, Yonkers and New Rochelle intact.

The 2021 redistricting cycle will be the first without Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act that was in place to protect against discriminatory redistricting and ensuring new boundary lines did not dilute minority voting strength

There is a long history of using the redistricting process as a mechanism for excluding voters of color and diminishing their voting power. Previously communities of color and the groups that represent them did not have a voice in the redistricting process. That’s why it is critical for me, given the opportunity, to accept and be involved in the redistricting process. I appreciate your time holding these public hearings to truly hear what the people have to say.

The maps drawn will determine the allocation of political power and representation for the next ten years.

I am a very active member of the community, currently President of the Co-op City Branch of the NAACP, 2nd Vice President of the Spanish American Community Club of Co-op City, and Co-founder and Vice President of the Rivers Run Community Garden in addition to a host of other affiliations. I say this to demonstrate my healthy interaction within our community and knowledge of shared economies and common demographics with Southern Westchester.

There is a plethora of commonalities ethnically, racially and economically. Additionally, I can attest to the many religious affiliations those from the northern Bronx and southern Westchester have with religious institutions such as the Greater Baptist Church, Greater Centennial A.M.E. Zion Church and the Church of God of Mt. Vernon. Youth from the northern Bronx go to schools in southern Westchester and those in southern Westchester go to schools in the north Bronx.

The northern Bronx and, southern Westchester have common interests in the area of affordable housing, Southern Westchester has a large immigrant population from the Caribbean and continental Africa, more so than other parts of Westchester. The north Bronx has the same. We do not want to see their voices diluted. A number of those in the northern Bronx are employed in southern Westchester and conversely those in southern Westchester are employed in the North Bronx. Our community connectivity will increase with the commencing of the Metro North Train transportation line scheduled to begin soon with its first stop in the North Bronx, Co-op City.

 On a personal note, my primary and other specialty Doctors are located in southern Westchester, Hartsdale, New Rochelle and Yonkers. Along with many members of my community the supermarkets we frequent are in Southern Westchester. Key point in this statement, we are vested in each other’s well-being and our common interests and interactions help support the economies of one another.

Acknowledging our diversity continues to make us a strong District. Over the years we have forged friendships with our neighboring community members solidifying our Community of Interest. We don’t want our District broken up in pieces whereby our voices are inconsequential and our needs and concerns not addressed. Consider the value of multiracial and diverse communities. Keep our established connections in place.

Thank you for your time.