



**Written Testimony of Rebecca Telzak
Deputy Director, Make the Road New York**

**Submitted to the New York State Independent Redistricting Commission
February 15, 2023**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding the Assembly redistricting maps. I testify as a long-time Jackson Heights, Queens resident and mother, and as the Deputy Director of Make the Road New York (MRNY). MRNY operates community centers in Jackson Heights, Queens; Brentwood, Long Island; Bushwick, Brooklyn; Port Richmond, Staten Island; and White Plains, Westchester. Our 25,000 members build the power of our communities to achieve dignity and justice through organizing, policy innovation, transformative education, and survival services.

We have worked for 25 years to increase the voice of and representation for immigrant communities and communities of color across Queens and other areas of our state. One of the areas where we have done the most work has been in western Queens. We currently operate a community center in Jackson Heights, after relocating from Woodside more than a decade ago. Most of our Queens membership lives in Western Queens.

I write to express concern about the IRC's Assembly map proposal for western Queens, which we believe will reduce representation for immigrant and Latine communities—and communities of color more broadly—in the region.

In recent years, our members have organized successfully to register, educate, and mobilize members of our communities to participate in the political process—both in campaigns to win public policies, in the census process (for which we conducted outreach to tens of thousands of Queens residents), and in advance of elections. We have taken major strides forward—following the census and with the current Assembly map passed last year, we are finally in a position where the six primary Assembly districts in the area (30, 34, 35, 36, 37, and 39) are represented by people of color, several of which come from diverse immigrant backgrounds. Of these six, three of them are Latine.

The IRC proposal would make that level of representation virtually impossible to maintain. We are particularly concerned that the Latine community would lose ground. For the communities we represent, the districts as they are currently constituted would be far better for maintaining the current level of representation, rather than finding it reduced.

We therefore urge the IRC to revise the map for Western Queens and revert to the district lines passed last year for this region.

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Once again, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this reform. Should you have any questions, please reach out to me at rebecca.telzak@maketheroadny.org or 347-512-9073.