

February 7, 2023

Dear Chair Jenkins, Vice Chair Nesbitt, and Commissioners of the IRC:

We are the elected Democratic Party officials representing the 76th Assembly District, which for decades has encompassed the eastern part of the Upper East Side (including Yorkville and Lenox Hill) and Roosevelt Island. We encourage the IRC to reconsider its plan to separate these neighborhoods in its Draft Assembly Plan.

The historical grouping of Roosevelt Island and the Upper East Side in a single Assembly District makes perfect sense in several ways:

- **Community**: Both neighborhoods are home to significant numbers of hospital workers, United Nations personnel, and senior citizens, among other groups. In addition, Cornell University has a significant presence in both: Weill Cornell Medical College is in Lenox Hill, and Cornell Tech and medical school housing are on Roosevelt Island.
- **Geography**: Roosevelt Island and the Upper East Side are linked by subway, Tram, and ferry, and both contain a large amount of urban space with one stellar greenspace (Carl Schurz Park in Yorkville, Four Freedoms Park on Roosevelt Island). In terms of housing, both neighborhoods are population dense with many high-rise rental buildings.
- **Governance**: Not only are Roosevelt Island and the Upper East Side part of the same borough, but they also share a community district, school district, library system, congressional district, City Council district, State Senate district, and Municipal Court district.

Despite these many ties between Roosevelt Island and the Upper East Side, the IRC's Draft Assembly Plan would split the two neighborhoods, joining Roosevelt Island with Sutton Place, Midtown East, Astoria, and Long Island City. The state constitution requires the IRC to consider "the maintenance of cores of existing districts, of pre-existing political subdivisions, including counties, cities, and towns, and of communities of interest" when drawing Assembly districts. The IRC's proposal does not comply with any of these criteria.

Although the state constitution does not define "communities of interest," it is clear under any definition that Roosevelt Island and the Upper East Side qualify. As shown above, the two neighborhoods share much in common, in ways that the rest of the city—including the neighborhoods that the IRC proposes to include in the new 36th Assembly District—does not. The IRC's proposal also fails the other constitutional requirements: it unnecessarily splits the core of the existing 76th Assembly District; and it joins Roosevelt Island with neighborhoods to which it is much more tenuously connected, including portions of an entirely different borough with which it shares no other current political ties. We cannot understand why the IRC would make such a change, which is foolhardy at best and unlawful at worst.

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In a previous redistricting context, a three-judge federal court sitting in Brooklyn observed: "[T]he identification of a 'community of interest[]' . . . requires insights that cannot be obtained

from maps or even census figures. Such insights require an understanding of the community at issue, which can often be acquired only through direct and extensive experience with the day-to-day lives of an area's residents."¹ We have been charged by residents of Roosevelt Island and the Upper East Side with understanding their communities and advocating on their behalf. Based on this hard-earned knowledge, we can say with confidence that Roosevelt Island belongs in the same State Assembly district as Yorkville and Lenox Hill.

We thank you for considering our thoughts on this important matter.

Sincerely,



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¹ *Favors v. Cuomo*, 2012 WL 928223, at *5 (E.D.N.Y. Mar. 19, 2012), <https://casetext.com/case/favors-v-cuomo-7>.