

DECEMBER 14, 2010

Senator Martin Malave Dilan and Members of LATFOR:

My name is Barbara Zucker, and I am Vice President for Public Policy of the Women's City Club of New York, a nonprofit, nonpartisan, multi-issue civic organization founded in 1915. Our mission is to improve the lives of New Yorkers by helping to shape public policy and promoting responsible government.

As an organization founded by a group of suffragists, the Women's City Club has always had a particular interest in electoral matters. We believe that the decennial redistricting should be performed by an **independent nonpartisan commission**. The current process of partisan redistricting distorts legislative representation. Many other so-called "good government groups" share this position. Bills to establish an independent redistricting commission are introduced in the state legislature at every session, but have so far failed to be enacted. In the absence of a nonpolitical or less political process, I am here today to urge that the 2012 redistricting at least be performed with as much **transparency and public participation** as possible.

Public participation is an essential part of the democratic process. We all deplore the low turnout in elections, and the situation is growing worse. New York State was dead last in voter participation in 2010. Many New Yorkers decline to vote because the elections are not competitive. For instance, there are presently 18 Assembly districts in Queens, but in 11 of those districts only one person was on the ballot in 2010. Clearly those district lines were drawn to protect the incumbents, and in those districts it was an election in name only.

We must bring the public into the process as much as possible. There should be a series of **public meetings** throughout the state where citizens can comment on the redistricting proposals, especially with respect to their own communities.

Advances in technology have brought **mapping capabilities** to many. The Brookings Institution has recommended several steps involving access to data and software systems which could enable communities to create and analyze proposed redistricting plans. The public should be provided with sufficient information to understand the proposals and the conflicting regulations that must be followed. The Internet should be used to keep the public informed throughout the process.

We urge you to give New Yorkers the opportunity to participate in this decennial process in a meaningful way.