Remarks for Redistricting Public Hearing

(White Plains, New York November 8, 2022, rev. 11.14.22)

Good Afternoon Chairman Imamura and Vice Chairman Martin and members of the Commission:

I’m Suzanne Berger and for the last 31 years, I’ve resided in the Village of Dobbs Ferry, Town of Greenburgh (Westchester County).

In the past year and a half, I’ve had the privilege of visiting, on multiple occasions, all six Westchester Cities, its 19 Towns and 23 Villages where Westchester’s 1,004,457 residents live.

My remarks focus on the Congressional District maps for two Westchester Districts. These “vertical” maps -- for what are now CDs 16 and 17 -- do not change the downstate districts drawn by the Commission (except for an adjustment to what is now CD14 to balance population in the Bronx).

Westchester communities are bound together by their proximity to either the Hudson River on the west, or to the Long Island Sound on the East. Every morning, when I board the Hudson Line to go to work, I look across the River at Rockland’s River towns.

Westchester’s inland rivers run north and south, (the Saw Mill River, the Bronx River and the Hutchinson River) as do the parkways that follow those rivers. I 64 similarly runs north south.

Westchester’s rail transportation runs north south (The New Haven, Harlem and Hudson Metro-North Lines and two Amtrak lines).

The Croton Aqueduct, a state park runs north south, as do many trailways.

Our communities are connected along these north south spines.

So, when I looked at the preliminary maps proposed by this Commission (Maps “O” and “S”), I immediately wondered why the artificial dividing line of I 287 was used. Why not have Westchester’s two Congressional Districts run north south like its rivers and its transportation, making a Hudson River District and a Sound Shore District and connecting the communities that share these important assets.

And, the numbers make that possible, indeed advisable. A District that runs South from the City of Peekskill through Cortlandt, Ossining and Mt. Pleasant to the Greenburgh border with Yonkers (including Greystone, along the Hudson River, and West to include Yorktown, New Castle, and most of White Plains, joined with Rockland County across the Mario Cuomo Bridge and into the Orange County Communities of Warwick, Highland Falls and Tuxedo Park (these Orange County communities would be about 5% of the proposed district) would have 776,000 residents.

The vertical plan has another benefit: it keeps Greenburgh, Westchester’s largest Town of 95,400 residents living in six villages and hamlets, together in one Congressional District. They share a town government, an Assembly member (92), and a State Senator (35), and should also share a congressional representative. The Commission’s plan (“O”) splits off the Village of Tarrytown from the rest of the Town of Greenburgh to make a path to Rockland, but that does not match the governmental structure of the Town or the Village. The proposed CD 17 includes the Town/Village of Scarsdale which shares a post-office address with the southern Greenburgh area of Edgemont. Other parts of Greenburgh have White Plains post office addresses, and in this proposed map Greenburgh and most of White Plains are in the same congressional district.

The companion district would include Yonkers, Mt. Vernon, Pelham, the Bronx communities of Co-op City and Wakefield, part of New Rochelle and then run up the Sound through Mamaroneck, Rye and Port Chester, West to Mt. Kisco and Bedford, north to Lewisboro, North Castle and Somers and the eastern portion of Putnam County, to bring the census up to 776,000.

I’ve seen a few raised eyebrows from residents in the southern part of the proposed District about Putnam’s placement, but let’s remember, Putnam shares State Senate District 40, and two Assembly Districts (94 and 95) with Westchester, so it has that historical connection.

I note that the drawing does show a District 15 coming up into New Rochelle to adjust the populations and allow District 16 to incorporate the Bronx neighborhoods I mentioned.

And frankly, one of the stronger points in favor of this vertical map. It matches the State legislative districts drawn by the Commission. The Commission recognized the verticality of the County when drawing the Assembly Districts, all of which run North South; for example 92 and 95 along the Hudson, and 91 along the Sound Shore, with 93 running down the Center of the County). Same for Senate Districts. Look as Senate District AM (hugging the Sound Shore, running from Mamaroneck to Port Chester including Armonk, Mt. Kisco and Bedford) and the State Assembly Map CC (New Rochelle to Port Chester) , or Senate Map AQ, hugging the Hudson River from Greystone to Mt. Pleasant (and Assembly Map CN from Greystone to Pleasantville) .

If that works for the State Districts, the benefit of having the same districts share congressional representation would be important.

Please consider drawing Westchester’s two Congressional districts along a vertical axis (north of Yonkers). It makes topographical and demographic sense.

Thank you.

Attachments: Slide deck with proposed Congressional Districts 16 and 17 and shape map.