

ULSTER COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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Dear New York State Independent Redistricting Commission:

I have the honor of serving as the Executive of Ulster County, a place that my family has called home for five generations. I am writing to you today to discuss the county in relation to redistricting. As you are aware, the New York State Legislature voted on January 10th to reject the redistricting maps as proposed by the commission. I am deeply concerned about the prospect of Ulster County being split between Congressional Districts as proposed in your previous drafts.

Since 1840, Ulster County has remained in a single Congressional District in all but one round of redistricting. Undoubtedly, this has consistently happened because previous State Legislatures and State Courts have acknowledged the uniqueness and interconnectedness of the community and the importance of it remaining within a single district.

Splitting Ulster County, which has consistently and clearly been identified as a community of interest, would have a multitude of negative impacts in representation, drawing arbitrary and harmful divisions between communities that currently share school districts, businesses and economic zones, water and sewer districts, fire and emergency services, roads and other infrastructure, drinking water, and much more.

I am particularly concerned that our critical efforts to recover and rebuild after the COVID-19 pandemic will be negatively impacted if the county were to be split across districts. For example, we have finalized plans to utilize \$34 million in federal relief funds that were allocated directly to the county, enabling us to rebuild our economy, provide quality housing for all residents, and address major gaps in our mental health and addiction recovery systems. The federal government's decision to provide these funds directly to the county further reinforces the centrality of the county as an important and single community of interest. Splitting Ulster County across two districts would clearly undercut and harm these efforts.

This dynamic is similar across a myriad of vital programs and services — many of them fully or partially federally-funded — that are administered at the county level. Splitting the county across multiple Congressional Districts would negatively impact the quality and accessibility of a wide range of services for hundreds of thousands of people, from healthcare (e.g. Medicaid) to workforce development (e.g. WIOA programs) to housing and economic development (e.g. CDBG). In particular, the proposal to split Kingston and Ellenville — the two municipalities in

the county with the highest proportion of Black and Latino residents, and also the highest levels of poverty — would significantly harm our coordinated efforts to serve these often underrepresented and underserved communities.

In addition, I am very concerned about the prospect of splitting the Hudson River towns on both sides of the river (especially the river towns in Ulster and Dutchess counties), which have a centuries-long tradition of connectivity and unique characteristics that require unified representation. From our shared economies and universities, to the two major bridges (and the Walkway Over the Hudson) directly linking the counties, to the “Hudson 7” communities that collectively draw drinking water for more than 100,000 people from the Hudson River, these towns clearly constitute a community of interest.

In summary, any future Congressional Districts must maintain the integrity of the community of interest in Ulster County, and must make every effort to also incorporate the river towns on the eastern side of the Hudson River in Dutchess County. Dividing Kingston from Esopus, Highland from Poughkeepsie, and Ellenville from Rochester would ignore the clear reality on the ground in the everyday lives of residents, have negative impacts on the quality of service delivery for hundreds of thousands of people in the region, and run contrary to our democratic principles of fair and equal representation.

In conclusion, I strongly urge the New York State Independent Redistricting Commission to recognize nearly two centuries of historical precedent along with uniquely important community characteristic needs in keeping Ulster County intact when it adapts new Congressional Districts. I appreciate your consideration in this matter and I offer myself or my office if we can be of any assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'PR', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Patrick K. Ryan
Ulster County Executive