



March 21, 2023

New York State Independent Redistricting Commission
250 Broadway, 22nd Floor
New York, NY 10007

Dear members of the Independent Redistricting Commission:

I am the Executive Director of the Community Outreach Center, a non-profit organization based in the Town of Ramapo that is dedicated to improving the lives of people in need of assistance. In that role as a community leader and advocate, I am privileged to represent a rather large group of individuals and families in Ramapo from all walks of life, including minority communities. Amongst the people that we service are over 75,000 Orthodox Jews who call Ramapo home.

With a community makeup such as ours, which includes a sizable Yiddish-speaking population, we are unquestionably a community of interest. As such, when it comes to the redistricting process and the assessment of state legislative district lines, this community should absolutely be contained within a single Assembly District.

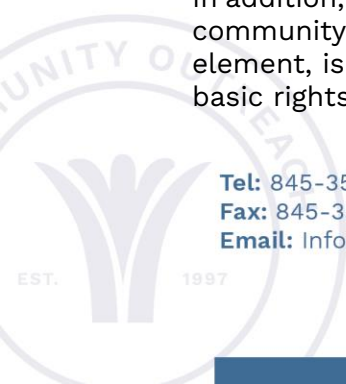
It is therefore perplexing that the Town of Ramapo located in Rockland County, despite its unique demographic characteristics, is split into three different Assembly Districts (districts 96, 97 and 98), especially when you consider the constitutional provisions that exist in New York State. According to our state constitution, among the factors that must be given due consideration during the redistricting process is "whether the new district lines would result in the prohibited denial or abridgment of racial or language minority voting rights," and "the maintenance of existing districts, pre-existing political subdivisions, including counties, cities, towns, and communities of interest."

While Ramapo, with a population in excess of 148,000, is perhaps too large to comprise a single Assembly District, there is no justifiable reason as to why it would be split into three different districts. Carving up a municipality in this fashion appears to be antithetical to the constitutional mandates that govern this process, and allowing this injustice to stand would be a dereliction of this Commission's duty to ensure fair and adequate representation for all New Yorkers.

In addition, with common social and economic interests and concerns, the Orthodox Jewish community in Ramapo, which, as I noted hereinabove has a significant Yiddish-speaking element, is indeed a community of interest that should be protected, not denied its most basic rights.

Tel: 845-356-9600
Fax: 845-356-9612
Email: Info@COOnline.org

21 Remsen Avenue, Suite 201 | Monsey, NY 10952





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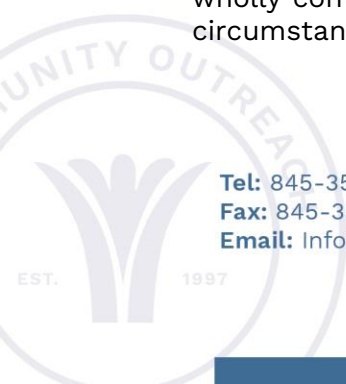
When considering the factors that I have enumerated above, it is surprising that the New York State Independent Redistricting Commission put forth a proposed map that seemingly ignores our status as a community of interest. I hope that the Commission will use this opportunity to contemplate the issues that I raised and reconsider its proposal as it pertains to the Town of Ramapo.

Furthermore, at a time of rising antisemitism and a rash of hate crimes targeting Jews, the Jewish community cannot have its voice suppressed; rather, it must be given ample opportunities to amplify its voice and advocate for itself during these very challenging times.

It was just a little over three years ago that there was a deadly anti-Semitic attack in our town during the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah. The image of a madman entering a rabbi's home and stabbing people with a machete will be forever embedded in our minds, and that horrific attack changed our community forevermore. In the aftermath of that horrible event, people from different communities came together to condemn the heinous attack and to offer much-needed support. While Ramapo's Jewish community received resources and security assistance from the Governor's office and the State Senate, the State Assembly failed to provide any assistance in the wake of this indescribable tragedy. Not surprisingly, with our town split among three Assembly Members, not one of them considered this their issue, as Ramapo is often seen as an afterthought.

Carving up our community and our town and creating a situation where we are represented by individuals whose full attention is not necessarily on Ramapo has a deleterious effect on our residents. The people who call our diverse town home are disenfranchised due to the status quo, and this Commission should remedy the situation immediately.

I respectfully suggest that the Commission create an Assembly District that comprises most of the Town of Ramapo within it. The villages located in the western part of the town, Hillburn, Montebello, Sloatsburg, and Suffern, which are in relative proximity to Orange County, should then be placed in an Assembly District together with their Orange County neighbors. Doing so would ensure that our very distinct community of interest would be wholly contained within a single district, which is how it should ideally be in light of the circumstances and the constitutional mandates governing this process.





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We are one community, and the common threads that bind us together as a community of interest should be respected and considered in the context of this redistricting process. As you move forward in this process, I implore you to be cognizant of our town's unique needs and status and ensure that fairness prevails. Having a single Assembly Member represent us is of paramount importance and the most judicious approach.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Hersh Horowitz
Executive Director