March 6, 2023

Re: New York State Independent Redistricting Commission

To Whom It May Concern:

We write to you today to urge you not to divide the shared community of Lovejoy and Sloan into separate Assembly districts. The current boundaries for the 143rd Assembly District reflect that western Cheektowaga and the Lovejoy area of Buffalo’s East Side share a common history and long-standing community connections, as well as share many demographic and socioeconomic similarities. If the proposed boundaries for the 143rd Assembly District are adopted, this community’s representation in New York State government would be divided and significantly diluted.

 The west Cheektowaga/east Buffalo community share a similar history, having been inhabited early on by an influx of Polish Americans. This community retains a strong and proud Polish heritage, with cherished institutions like the Corpus Cristi and St. John Kanty churches, the Am Pol Eagle newspaper, the Polish Arts Club, and countless beloved Polish restaurants and bakeries. Even today, our community has among the highest percentages of Polish Americans in the nation. More recently, our neighborhood has seen growing diversity, welcoming many African American residents in prior decades and South Asian immigrants, particularly Bangladeshis, in more recent years. This diversity is apparent in recent Census data: the 14212 and 14206 area codes, which comprise most of this community, are home to thousands of Black, Asian, and Hispanic residents. Today, our community is also home to many cultural centers, houses of worship, restaurants, and specialty grocers that cater to these unique racial, ethnic, and religious minorities. By contrast, the largely rural eastern portion of the Town of Lancaster is far less diverse, overwhelmingly white, and lacks institutions that cater to minority communities. If the Independent Redistricting Commission adopts its proposed boundaries for Assembly District 143, you will separate these unique ethnic, racial, and religious communities, and dilute their political power in state government.

 This community also shares similar socioeconomic conditions, which differ greatly from the area that the IRC proposes to add to this Assembly District. Our community is urban in character and features modest, mostly older homes set closely to one another in multi-family zoning, many of which are rentals. This is a far cry from the much wealthier, exurban subdivisions, isolated country homes, and single-family zoning that characterizes eastern Lancaster. More importantly, this community has social problems that are not nearly as severe these exurban areas, including poverty, food and housing insecurity, and public safety. In fact, recent Census data shows that average household incomes in the west Cheektowaga/east Buffalo community are barely above $40,000 — less than half the average income of households in areas of eastern Lancaster. And poverty is exponentially higher in our community — above 20% in some zip codes — than in Lancaster, where the 14086 area code recorded less than 4% of residents living in poverty, according to recent Census data. As a result, residents in our community are more concerned with issues like reliable public transit, adequate social services, and protections for renters, which are not priorities to many exurban residents. It’s clear our community has much different interests than the area that would be added to our Assembly District under the IRC’s proposed map. Under such a map, our representative(s) in Albany would likely be less attuned to the more severe social problems facing the less advantaged residents of our community.

 Sloan and Lovejoy, like nearby areas of west Cheektowaga and east Buffalo, also share strong community connections among residents. Our neighbors frequently utilize our shared public spaces, such as the Hennepin Senior Center, Lincoln Field House, Lovejoy Pool, Griffith Park, and the Sloan Community Center. Many of us buy our groceries at the Sloan Super Market, dine out at longtime restaurants along the Lovejoy and Broadway commercial corridors, and see friends at the same neighborhood taverns. Though divided by the eastern city line, this community shares particularly close ties because of past urban planning mistakes that have divided us from other parts of our city and town. In fact, Lovejoy and Sloan are nicknamed Iron Island because we are surrounded on every side by successions of railroad tracks and thruways, including the CSX Transportation Frontier Yard and Interstates 90 and 190. These infrastructure divisions mean that we share a common community and character, regardless of municipal lines that were drawn some two centuries ago.

 As longtime residents of Lovejoy, Sloan, and adjacent neighborhoods know, we are not two separate communities beside one another. We are one continuous community with a shared history, shared businesses and cultural institutions, and similar racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic demographics. Dividing our community into separate Assembly Districts — and enjoining west Cheektowaga with far-flung and vastly different exurban areas — will do a disservice to residents and weaken our power in state government. For all these reasons, we urge you to keep this community whole, in one like-minded Assembly District, in the legislative maps for the coming decade.

Sincerely,

Amy Raslawsky

President

ELCON Block Club

East Lovejoy