



City of Niagara Falls, New York

Robert M. Restaino

Mayor

September 28, 2021

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

RE: CONGRESSIONAL REDISTRICTING AND NIAGARA FALLS

Honorable Commissioners:

As Mayor of Niagara Falls, I write to suggest best practices for redistricting as they relate to our city.

OPPOSITION TO RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF SO-CALLED "EARMUFF" DISTRICT

In 2002, mapmakers in Albany created a district for Western New York that combined the City of Niagara Falls with portions of the cities of Buffalo and Rochester. To accomplish this, they connected these heavily populated urban areas by means of a contiguous stretch of land traveling north from Buffalo through portions of Niagara County including the city of Niagara Falls, then due east along the shores of Lake Ontario in Niagara and Orleans Counties, south through the city of Rochester and terminating in the southeastern Monroe County town of Perinton. It quickly became known as the "Earmuff District." Plainly stated, that experience was suboptimal for Niagara Falls.

The best congressional districts are compact and contiguous, combining residents of shared interests and communities of concern. The 2002 "Earmuff District," resulted in a hodgepodge district that unnecessarily combined communities which have historically been competitors for governmental resources and who have, in many respects, divergent governmental interests. In this district, one Member of Congress was required to service the divergent needs of upstate New York's premier natural attraction along with its two largest metropolitan communities, in addition to a string of very different municipalities connected in a district whose driving distance spanned more than 130 miles from one end to the other. Its composition forced the inclusion of many suburban, exurban, and rural areas into the "Earmuff District" that lacked substantial commonality with the Rochester metropolitan area which served as the district's core.

It has been reported that there may be efforts underway to convince mapmakers of the advisability of re-creating the "Earmuff District;" to connect the city of Rochester once again to

areas more than 100 miles to its west in Niagara and Erie Counties. I want to urge you in the strongest possible terms **NOT** to re-create the “Earmuff District.”

SUPPORT FOR INCLUSION OF NIAGARA FALLS IN AN URBAN NIAGARA FRONTIER DISTRICT

In two sets of maps released by commissioners on September 15, 2021, Niagara Falls was removed from a district that also included the city of Buffalo. Niagara Falls and Buffalo are communities of similar concern and character. We believe it critically important that because of their proximity and similar character these two localities should remain in the same district, as they have since 2013. As indicated above in detail, we oppose moving Niagara Falls into a district centered in Rochester, but at the same time believe that combining Niagara Falls as you have in these draft maps moves an urban city into a substantially rural environment. We do not believe this best serves the people of our city.

The re-creation of an “Earmuff District” or any similar district which seeks to put Niagara Falls and Buffalo into the same district as Rochester would be an unfortunate decision that would serve to undermine the interests of both areas. We encourage you to reject any such consideration thereof. Moreover, we believe it similarly important that Niagara Falls remain situated in an urban district and encourage that change in future draft maps that are considered. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Robert M. Restaino", with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the left.

Robert M. Restaino
Mayor
City of Niagara Falls

cc: Hon. Carl Heastie, Speaker, NYS Assembly (NYS Capitol, Albany, NY 12248)
Hon. Andrea Stewart Cousins, Maj Leader, NYS Senate (NYS Capitol, Albany, NY 12248)
Legislative Task Force on Redistricting, (250 Broadway, Ste. 2100, New York, NY 10007)