

Testimony to the Independent Redistricting Commission (IDR)

From: Tina Volz-Bongar, Peekskill, New York / tina@bongarbiz.com

Hello,

My name is Tina Volz-Bongar. I have lived in Peekskill, NY for sixteen and half years. I am a Democratic Party district leader for Peekskill ED-1, a district that includes public housing voters. I am also an environmental justice advocate, a member of environmental groups United for Clean Energy, Resist Spectra gas pipeline as well as a trained Climate Reality Leader by Al Gore.

I have given previous comment to the IDR Commission about the needs of two communities of interests. These are 1. public housing conditions and improvement interests, housing and social justice communities, and 2. managing an over-burden of environmental pollution and waste interests, representing critical environmental justice issues.

Unfortunately, I have not seen my comments on these two communities of interests reflected in the NAMES and LETTERS maps neither for Congress nor the New York Senate. (I have found no exception with New York Assembly Letters Map AU and these two communities of interest.)

Therefore I am presenting more in-depth examples of my personal experience as a Democratic Party district leader and environmental advocate about the immediate crisis interests of these two communities of interest.

Not addressing these immediate — crisis — housing and environmental justice interests impacts the fair and equal representation of minorities. This is a stated goal of this commission. (In addition, Peekskill's minority population is 66.7%, a majority of interest for population the City of Peekskill.)

Community of interest #1 - Public housing

EXAMPLE: Emergency Rental Assistance Program- ERAP- funding:

I have volunteered the last five months to fill out applications for this funding for residents of public housing in my voting district. Even though Peekskill public housing residents have been impacted by COVID the most, they are receiving ERAP funding last. The federal and state disbursement of emergency rental COVID funds shows a discrimination toward people receiving HUD Section 8 funding and who live in public housing. Private landlords and entities are receiving this rental assistance first.

For example, Westchester County received \$22M plus. For Peekskill public housing residents, over \$200,000 in back rental assistance is needed for

housing security to avoid eviction. ERAP funding has dried up according to our NY State Assembly member's office. As of September 1, Peekskill public housing residents have received \$3,850 of the over \$300,00 needed — even though Westchester County received over \$22M. Public housing residents are forced to wait for the next round of funding, if at all.

EXAMPLE: Improving Public housing in our Congressional district in Northern Westchester:

For the first time this year residents in Peekskill public housing have representation at the federal level and received appropriations money for improved kitchens in Dunbar Heights. This improvement comes at the same time as other funding for improved bathrooms. Now plumbing improvements and kitchen improvements can be done together. This plumbing overhaul hasn't come since the building of Dunbar in 1950.

SOLUTIONS FOR FAIR AND EQUITABLE REPRESENTATION OF MINORITIES:

The \$3B in Build Back Better Community Restoration and Revitalization Fund just passed by Congress provides the opportunity of competitive grants to local projects for public housing.

Neither Congressional maps Letters O or DCHWESTCHESTER share these needs and important representation with other cities or blocks of interests.

With the distribution of Build Back Better funds, for fair and equal representation our congressional representation should be shared with Ossining, Greenburgh, and White Plains who have significant public housing entities too.

Only expanding Congressional District O to include Greenburgh and White Plains would create a contiguous district for this community of interest in public housing. It would also address the same issues as outlined in the Westchester County Housing Needs Assessment: <https://homes.westchestergov.com/resources/housing-needs-assessment>

In addition, the inclusion of Greenburgh and White Plains' would also increase the percentage of Latino voters in our new congressional district and be more representative of the Commission's goal of minority representation. First generation Hispanic voters are certainly a community of interest as well.

PROPOSED New York State and Assembly Member District Maps for fair and equitable representation of public housing:

New York Assembly map Senate Letters Map CP is representative of this public housing community of interest but Senate District Letters AU map should include Mount Kisco. The inclusion of the full block of Mt. Kisco would also

increase of the percentage of Latino voters in the Senate district and be more representative of the Commission's goal of minority representation. Right now Mt. Kisco shares concerns with Peekskill housing needs that the amount of Section 8 vouchers exceeds the supply of affordable rental housing.

Community of interest #2 -Environmental justice and pollution/waste burden

ISSUE: The Decommissioning of Indian Point

Peekskill is environmental justice community as outlined in a study in 2011 funded by the New York State Department of Conservation. COMMUNITY-BASED ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE INVENTORY FOR THE CITY OF PEEKSKILL. Available here: https://www.clearwater.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/CBEJI_FINAL-DRAFT-1-30-11-for-printing.pdf

With the decommissioning of Indian Point, over 2,000 tons of irradiated fuel rods join the environmental inventory of this study not only of Peekskill but of cities and towns along the Hudson River south of Indian Point.

Transportation of the used fuel rods to a federal nuclear waste repository in New Mexico is at the heart of Holtec's plan for decommissioning. National nuclear waste safety experts have testified before Congress warning about the safety and danger of these plans for transportation of nuclear waste either by barge along the Hudson River, or through roads in Westchester.

Congressional representation of this issue:

It is critical that our Congressional representation — and to our US SENATORS work on this issue — to continue to represent the Westchester Rivertowns to answer the question whether this nuclear waste should be stored safely on-site or transported south along the river or roads through Westchester.

NY STATE Senate and Assembly district representation for this community:

Assembly District Letters Map CP includes the full city of Ossining now which is also impacted by the decommissioning of Indian Point. New York State Letters Map AU as drawn does as well.

Thank you for your consideration.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment and I look forward to the presentation of final district maps.

Sincerely,

Tina Volz-Bongar / 426 Smith Street, Peekskill, NY 10566