



COUNTY OF ERIE

MARK C. POLONCARZ

COUNTY EXECUTIVE

October 1, 2021

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

RE: CONGRESSIONAL REDISTRICTING AND ERIE COUNTY

Honorable Commissioners:

As Erie County Executive, the issue of congressional representation for our county is of critical importance. In addition to the service members provide in terms of direct voting representation to the more than 950,000 residents of our county, Members of the House serve an important role on behalf of county and local governments, bridging the divides that exist between ours and the federal government and providing much-needed assistance to the local level.

In 2002, mapmakers in Albany created a congressional district for Western New York that combined portions of the city of Buffalo as well as the city of Tonawanda and the towns of Grand Island and Tonawanda with portions of the city of Rochester. To accomplish this, they connected these areas by means of a contiguous stretch of land traveling north from Buffalo's east side through northern Erie County through Niagara County, 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. Owing to its very strange shape, this district quickly became known as the "Earmuff District."

This attempt at congressional gerrymandering was suboptimal for Erie County. It 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 the most densely urban portions of upstate New York's two largest metropolitan communities, in addition to a string of very different rural 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 again connect the city of Rochester to areas more than 100 miles to its west in Erie County. As Erie County Executive, I urge you in the strongest possible terms not to re-create the "Earmuff District."

The present iteration of districts representing Erie County, in my view, correctly apportions residents and communities in the respective 26th and 27th Districts, with the former comprised of a substantially dense and urban population, and the latter more suburban and rural communities. While I leave it to commissioners to draw the fine details of each district, inasmuch as population shifts and the loss of a congressional seat statewide will make some changes inevitable, I am very much of the opinion that the general character of these districts as they currently are serves to represent the county well.

In closing, let me reiterate that the re-creation of an "Earmuff District" or any similar district which seeks to put any portion of Erie County into the same district as areas in the Rochester metropolitan area would be an unfortunate decision that would serve to undermine the interests of both Erie and Monroe counties and the citizens therein. I encourage you to reject any such consideration thereof. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Mark C. Poloncarz
Erie County Executive

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)