**New York State Independent Redistricting Commission**

**Hearing at Pace Law School**

**White Plains, New York**

Testimony of Robert B. Bernstein, Esq., of Bernstein & Associates, PLLC, Monday, November 8, 2021

Good afternoon Commissioners:

My name is Bob Bernstein, and I’m a registered voter in the 16th Congressional District, living in the unincorporated Village of Edgemont in the Town of Greenburgh. Thank you for inviting public comments.

The current districting divides Greenburgh between CD-16 to the south and CD-17 to the north. On behalf of the residents of my community, which is in the southernmost part of Greenburgh and the northernmost edge of CD-16, I respectfully suggest that the lines not only be redrawn to include all of Greenburgh in the same congressional district, but to extend those same lines eastward to include the Town/Village of Scarsdale and the City of White Plains. I support the map of CD-17 that has been proposed by Suzanne Berger. Let me explain a bit more about who I am and why I think it would be in the best interests of the residents of Greenburgh, Scarsdale and White Plains if they were all part of one Congressional district.

Edgemont is an unincorporated neighborhood of the Town of Greenburgh primarily known for its school district. Edgemont today is majority, with a large and growing East Asian and South Asian population. Many of our East Asian residents are very new to our area and are often isolated by language and culture. They need to be heard, but in a community like ours, which is in the northernmost fringe of a district that is mostly urban and very different from ours, they tend not to be seen and not heard. Redistricting could remedy that inequity.

Edgemont is situated in southern Westchester County, 20 miles from Grand Central Station in New York City, contains a land area of 2.6 miles, and has a population of approximately 7,500. We are bordered on the east by the Bronx River and the Village of Scarsdale, the west by the Sprain Brook Parkway, the south by the City of Yonkers, and the north by the Hartsdale section of unincorporated Greenburgh.

I have been practicing law for more than forty years. Before that I worked for six years on Capitol Hill in Washington for a U.S. Senator as a legislative assistant and later as a press secretary. I learned on the Hill the value of constituent service, whether it be getting federal money for various local infrastructure projects, or securing Veterans benefits, or helping someone with a Social Security or Medicare or immigration question. Local congressmen must field these inquiries every day. And they do it because it helps cement ties to the individual communities that make up his or her district.

I have lived in Edgemont for more than 30 years. My experience on the Hill and living in Edgemont has taught me that congressional districts should be drawn where possible to include whole communities rather than divide them. Local communities draw strength from being together in a single district. They are weakened when split up. Some infrastructure projects cannot get off the ground at all unless an entire impacted community has the backing of its local congressman. And if the impacted community is splintered or worse, where, as here, one crucial part of that community becomes part of a district that is centered miles and miles away, in an area that’s mostly urban with compelling problems of its own that are no less important than ours, our ability to get the backing we need becomes more challenging. That’s even more challenging if the impacts are mostly felt, as they are here, in an unincorporated part of a Town that under New York law can’t even legally elect its own mayor and trustees. There is often no one locally who is interested enough to speak for us, let alone wage a battle to fund a badly needed long overdue infrastructure project.

Let me give you a case in point.

Because we have for the past 30 years been on the cusp of one congressional district after another, with no one in Congress having any long-term vested interested in our welfare, our needs go unaddressed. I live near the Scarsdale border along the Bronx River. For the past 30 years, the Bronx River floods whenever we get a heavy rain, resulting in the closing of the Bronx River Parkway. With global warming and climate change, the flooding gets worse every year.

When I worked on Capitol Hill, the problem of a perennially flooding river was a priority for local congressmen – a chance to become a local hero and a legend. They made a point of working with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to address one problem after another. They made a point of getting grants for the local communities to improve their infrastructure in order to mitigate these problems. But no congressman in my 30 years living here has ever made it a priority to address flooding on the Bronx River for the obvious reason that there’s no reason for anyone with limited staff and competing priorities to commit long-term political energy to benefit a community that, because of redistricting, moves from one congressional district to another, and particularly where, as here, the impact is felt mainly in an unincorporated part of a Town that can’t even elect its own mayor and trustees to fight this battle and is on the northern fringe of much more urban congressional district to the south which has major pressing problems of its own to address.

Now, you can rectify that problem at least in part. Yes, all of Greenburgh should be in one congressional district, which means all of Edgemont should be in the same district too. But Scarsdale and White Plains should be part of that district as well. The Bronx River flows between us and them. And putting these three communities in the same congressional district would create an opportunity for a congressman to invest long-term efforts in getting federal resources to solve the problems we’re facing. And it’s not just flooding on the Bronx River. It’s money for sidewalks to make it safer for our kids to walk to school or our residents to walk to work or to the train or for those commuting to our commercial areas who also need a safe place to walk. It’s money to help with mass transit, it’s money to help us repurpose our aging commercial infrastructure and rebuild our federal highways and bridges, and it’s money to address chronic drainage problems. And it’s money to help retrain local law enforcement so that, instead of bulking up on surplus federal military equipment, it can instead bulk up on non-violent means to keep our communities safe and secure, and our police respected and trusted.

Congress has just passed a $1 trillion infrastructure bill, but there’s no congressman with a long-term vested interest in my area who knows enough about our community to get some of those funds directed our way. These are just some of the problems of suburbia today that could be remedied in part by drawing an exclusively suburban congressional district.

I thank you for your time.