

Written Testimony on behalf of Common Cause New York before the New York State Independent Redistricting Commission

March 8, 2023

Common Cause NY is a nonpartisan, grassroots organization dedicated to creating open, honest, and accountable government that serves the public interest. At the core of that goal is transparent and independent redistricting, and we have long fought for fair representation on both the state and local levels. In 2011, we released the only set of [nonpartisan redistricting maps](#) for both the state legislature and Congress, which were ultimately used as templates for those in place for the past decade. In 2021-2022, Common Cause New York trained partners and advocates on drawing community maps and meaningful participation in the redistricting process ahead of the Commission's public hearings. After the New York State Court of Appeals invalidated the enacted Congressional and State Senate maps drawn by the legislature, we [responded and released our own proposed Congressional and Senate maps](#).

Over the past two months, we have been analyzing the newly proposed Assembly maps and gathering feedback from our membership across the state. Today, we submit the following commentary and recommendations and encourage the Commission to consider the information presented in this testimony when making the necessary changes to district map drafts.

We want to acknowledge the Commission's effort to create more competitive districts (46 vs. the NYS legislature's 40) and fewer "safe" districts (91 vs. the NYS legislature's 97). The Commission's plan also scores slightly higher on measure of compactness. The starkest differences between the Commission's plans and the legislature's enacted maps are observed in the divisions of particular neighborhoods, cities, and communities of interest.

On Long Island, we urge the Commission to adjust the proposals for AD 11 and 18. In both instances, the map created by the State legislature is superior with respect to keeping communities together: the legislature's AD 11 does a better job of keeping together Black communities in the Amityville-Wyandanch area, while the legislature's AD 18 appropriately keeps Lakewood (a historically majority-Black community) in a plurality Black district together with Hempstead, Uniondale, and Roosevelt. Therefore, we encourage the Commission to redraft AD 18 to avoid splitting off Lakewood into a majority-white AD 21 based in Rockville Centre.

In Queens, the Commission makes notable improvements to AD 24 by including Richmond Hill, Ozone Park, and South Ozone Park together in one compact district as the South Asian and Guyanese communities have been asking for 20 years. The Commission's plan for AD 30 also better represents the growing Asian community in the area. However, we strongly urge the Commission to modify the area encompassing Assembly districts 36, 37, 38, 50, and 53.

The Commission's proposal for AD 36 combines parts of Long Island City and Astoria with Roosevelt Island and the East Side of Manhattan, grouping together distinct communities of interest. Similarly, proposed AD 38 stretches from Rego Park to Ridgewood to East Williamsburg to Greenpoint to parts of Sunnyside and Long Island City, resulting in a combination of neighborhoods with no shared communities of interest and unnecessarily divides compact neighborhoods like Greenpoint, East Williamsburg, and Long Island City.

While the NYS legislature's map could be improved by adding a Brooklyn-Queens crossing between Bushwick and Ridgewood and perhaps a second crossing at Cypress Hills-Woodhaven, the legislature's plan does an overall better job of keeping neighborhoods in this area together, both on the Queens and Brooklyn sides.

In Brooklyn, we call on the Commission to redraft AD 44 to prevent splitting Carroll Gardens and AD 52 to prevent the split of Fort Greene.

In regards to Staten Island, the Commission's proposal for AD 61-64 is a welcome improvement – the newly drafted lines notably correct legislature's AD 61, which groups together North Shore Staten Island and the Financial District/Battery Park City in Manhattan, which face very different policy issues and challenges.

In Manhattan, we urge the Commission to adjust proposed AD 36 as the combination of Kips Bay and Turtle Bay with Astoria would likely leave the Manhattan portion with poor representation. If it is necessary to balance population deviations, perhaps the Commission could explore combining East Harlem and Mott Haven in the Bronx (similar to New York City Council's District 8) or creating a district that includes Inwood, Marble Hill, and Kingsbridge.

In the Bronx, the proposed extension of AD 80 from the east side of Bronx Park (Allerton/Pelham Pkwy) divides the Norwood neighborhood on the west side of Bronx Park.

In Westchester, we encourage the Commission to redraft proposed AD 92 to instead include the western portion of White Plains in order to keep together the Black and Latino communities in White Plains with the adjacent unincorporated part of the Town of Greenburgh and Village of Elmsford. Downtown White Plains forms a community of interest with the 119 corridor to the west – not with Scarsdale or far northern Westchester.

Common Cause NY acknowledges the Commission's efforts to keep Rockland County's Black and Latino communities together more coherently in AD 96, drawing together Spring Valley with part of Nyack and Haverstraw.

For the Hudson Valley region, we welcome the Commission's decision to eliminate the NYS legislature's "Lightning Bolt" AD 101.

Upstate, in the Capitol Region, the Commission's plan generally follows the Common Cause/NY preferred approach of keeping cities together when possible. In the Capitol Region, each city is kept whole in the Commission's plan, while the recently enacted map drawn by the legislature divides Schenectady.

Common Cause NY would also like to acknowledge how the Commission's proposed Assembly draft map treats larger upstate cities such as Syracuse, Rochester, and Buffalo, minimizing multiple divisions and creating compact districts with stronger minority influence and representation. This is a welcome improvement compared to the existing Assembly map, which engages in partisan gerrymandering to combine chunks of the cities with outlying suburban towns to create more reliably partisan districts. We especially would like to acknowledge the IRC's decision to keep the city of Syracuse together within AD 129 rather than splitting the city as was suggested by the NYS legislature's plan.

Thank you for allowing us to submit written comment on this matter. Please contact Common Cause New York (nyoffice@commoncause.org) with any questions or for any follow-up.



Common Cause New York is a nonpartisan citizens' lobby and a leading force in the battle for honest and accountable government. Common Cause fights to strengthen public participation and faith in our institutions of self-government and to ensure that government and political processes serve the general interest, and not simply the special interests. Consonant with our overall mission we have consistently worked to improve accessibility, accuracy, transparency, and verifiability in our democratic process at the city, state and national level.

