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Assemblymember 106th District
Columbia County
Dutchess County

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February 7, 2023

NYS Independent Redistricting Commission
Attention: Submissions
250 Broadway, 22nd Floor
New York, NY 10007

Dear Commissioners,

This testimony is in response to the draft New York State Assembly lines recently released by the New York State Independent Redistricting Commission. I write to share my observations about this region and the communities I have worked with, served and advocated for over a decade.

I have had the honor of representing 20 plus municipalities in Columbia and northern and central Dutchess counties since I was elected in a special election in 2012. Since 2013, this district has been called the 106th Assembly District (AD106). It is a largely rural district with small hamlets, several villages and one small city – the City of Hudson. It has many longtime family farms, world class soils, numerous state parks, historic sites and conservation areas, and is rich in both culture and history. It is a quintessential Hudson Valley district dependent upon the tourism, hospitality, agricultural and small business economies that have characterized this region, once known as the breadbasket of America, for centuries.

In your draft redistricting plan, Columbia and Dutchess counties are split into two Assembly districts. The proposed 107th Assembly District would encompass most, but not all, of Columbia County, randomly leaving out Ancram and Gallatin, two small Columbia County towns along the Dutchess border. The draft plan cuts the rest of Columbia County off from Dutchess County and attaches it to Greene County (across the Hudson River) and to Rensselaer County, a county to the north firmly rooted in the Capital District.

For more than 30 years, and through four redistricting processes, significant portions of Columbia and Dutchess Counties have always been united in a common Assembly District. Indeed, for residents of both Columbia and northern Dutchess, the proposed draft redistricting plan would significantly undercut long established communities of interest. The two counties share a border of more than 30 miles across which rural school districts overlap and family farms and other properties extend into both counties. Some folks who live in one county have mailing addresses in the other. And residents of both counties are actively engaged in the same Mid-Hudson Library District – a beloved community resource in our rural towns – which allows residents to borrow and return books and other media to nearby libraries.

Residents on both sides of the county line share a longtime commitment to protecting farmland and natural resources, and farmers and residents on both sides joined forces a few years back to fight against proposed monster power lines that threatened to slash through bucolic fields and historic sites. Recently I have worked with towns I represent on both sides of that border to find solutions to address the challenges of affordable housing on a scale that is appropriate to rural towns like these, but far different from more suburban or urban parts of the Capital District.

Making these redistricting changes truly impacts residents, their community connections and their ability to get help when they need it from their elected officials. We have seen this firsthand in the Town of Ghent, which for a decade was located entirely in the 106th Assembly District, but was cut out of the current 106th District, while surrounding communities of interest were not. In addition, the Village of Chatham, half of which is in the town of Chatham and half in the town of Ghent -- is now located entirely in the current 107th district, while the Town of Chatham, with the exception of a few carve outs, is located in the 106th District. This has caused great confusion and frustration for residents in all three of these communities, which share a common school district and view themselves as neighbors. I have heard from many Ghent and Chatham residents that they hope consideration be given to the uniting these communities in one Assembly District that reflects their shared interests.

In conclusion, as you prepare to present your first proposal of lines, I hope you will recognize that Columbia County is indeed part of the Hudson Valley and should stay connected to the long standing relationships built over decades, based on shared culture and reinforced in past redistricting cycles.

Sincerely,



Didi Barrett
Member of Assembly, 106th District