

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

REV. MARK E. BLUE  
President  
Buffalo, New York Branch Chartered



395 E. Ferry Street  
Buffalo, New York  
14208-1504

Phone (716) 884-7242  
Fax (716) 884-7243

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New York State Independent Redistricting Commission  
250 Broadway, 22<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 10007

**RE: CONGRESSIONAL REDISTRICTING FOR BUFFALO/NIAGARA REGION**

Honorable Commissioners:

As President of the Buffalo NAACP, I write to urge the following as it relates to Congressional redistricting for the Buffalo/Niagara Region:

1. Strongly opposition to any re-establishment of a district connecting any municipality within the Buffalo/Niagara Region to the city of Rochester and/or its surrounding communities (known in its 2003-2012 iteration as the "Earmuff" district); and
2. Strong support for Niagara Falls to remain included within in a district with the city of Buffalo.

In 2002, mapmakers in Albany created a district for Western New York that combined portions of the city of Buffalo with the city of Rochester. To accomplish this, they connected these heavily populated urban areas by means of a contiguous stretch of land traveling north from Buffalo through portions of Niagara County including the city of Niagara Falls, 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. It quickly became known as the "Earmuff District." The results were suboptimal for our region.

As you know, the best congressional districts are compact and contiguous, combining residents of shared interests and communities of concern. The "Earmuff District," by its very nature, violated these tenets, and due to its size and iteration 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 upstate New York's two largest metropolitan communities and a string of very different 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.

Honorable Commissioners

This is relevant to the current process because it has been reported that there may be efforts underway to convince mapmakers of the advisability of re-creating the “Earmuff District;” to connect the city of Rochester once again to areas more than 130 miles to its west in Niagara and Erie Counties. Plainly, we want to urge you in the strongest possible terms **NOT** to re-create the “Earmuff District.”

Additionally, in two sets of maps released by commissioners on September 15, 2021, Niagara Falls was removed from a district that also included the city of Buffalo. We believe this is a mistake. Niagara Falls and Buffalo are communities of similar concern and character. We believe it critically important that because of their proximity and similar character these two localities should remain in the same district, as they have since 2013, and indeed for generations the city of Niagara Falls has shared a district with at least a portion of the city of Buffalo. As indicated above in detail, we oppose combining any portions of the Buffalo/Niagara Region into a district centered in Rochester, but at the same time also believe that removing Niagara Falls from a district that includes Buffalo – as commissioners have in these draft maps – moves an urban city into a substantially rural environment. We do not believe this best serves our region.

It is our opinion that the re-creation of an “Earmuff District” or any similar district which seeks to put portions of the Buffalo/Niagara Region into the same district as Rochester would be an unfortunate decision that would serve to undermine the interests of both areas. We encourage you to reject any such consideration thereof. Moreover, we believe it similarly important that Niagara Falls remain situated in a single urban district with Buffalo and encourage that change in future draft maps that are considered. Thank you.

Sincerely,

*Mark E. Blue*

Rev. Mark Blue  
President  
NAACP Buffalo Branch  
395 East Ferry St.  
Buffalo, NY 14208  
716-884-7472 Ofc.  
716-884-7473 Fax

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)

