THE LEAGUE

OF WOMEN VOTERS®

OF SCARSDALE

Box 495, Scarsdale, NY 10583

Testimony Before the New York Independent Redistricting Committee

November 8, 2021

My name is Alissa Baum. I am the President of the League of Women Voters of Scarsdale. I am speaking today on behalf of the Scarsdale League’s Board of Directors. I appreciate the opportunity to speak before the Commission.

Both the League of Women Voters of Westchester and the League of Women Voters of New York State have expressed their disappointment regarding the conduct of the redistricting process thus far. We share their concerns about the partisanship and lack of transparency which continue to embroil the drafting of proposed legislative maps.

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan organization whose mission is to promote political responsibility through informed and active participation of citizens in government. As part of that mission, the Scarsdale League has educated and informed our residents about the redistricting process and encouraged them to identify communities of interest and advocate for the legislative maps that fairly represent them. In fact, many of our residents did just that by writing letters and testifying at the last round of IRC hearings.

Thus, the Scarsdale League Board was surprised to see that Scarsdale, which is thoroughly encompassed in the current Assembly District 88, has been split between two separate Assembly districts in the “Names” map released to the public. We are puzzled by the configuration of this map, and really by all of the recently released maps, because the Commission has provided no explanation whatsoever to justify the configuration of any of them.

Three of the core requirements in shaping districts set forth in the New York State Constitution are to keep communities of interest together, keep municipal boundaries intact/preserve political subdivisions, and maintain cores of existing districts. The “Names” map violates all three requirements as they apply to the Village of Scarsdale.

Scarsdale is a unique community, sharing common interests in its exceptional school system, nonpartisan election systems of Village and school governance, and its village-in-a-park zoning/planning and municipal services. Despite its relatively small size, it contains numerous Village-based volunteer-led community organizations, has an active local business alliance for brick and mortar shops within its borders, and remains one of few communities to have been able to sustain a printed newspaper of local circulation, serving as the official paper of record for both the co-terminous town/village and the school district. Why did the Commission disregard municipal lines and remove portions of four of the five Scarsdale neighborhoods from representation in a single Assembly district?

Scarsdale’s school district comprises one high school, one middle school and five elementary schools. In the “Names” map, segments of four of the five elementary schools - Edgewood, Fox Meadow, Heathcote, and Quaker Ridge -- have been cut off from the rest of the town of Scarsdale and placed into a different Assembly district, literally splitting the neighborhoods of four elementary schools that serve as the Village’s traditional polling sites. This result is totally unacceptable, and we fully expect the Commission to correct this grievous error.

The drawing of legislative districts may be an art rather than a science, requiring the commission to balance several factors in order to configure maps encompassing the entire state. However, without the opportunity to see the negotiation process or consider the Commission’s rationale, we have to wonder if the split of Assembly District 88 was due to an unlawful partisan or political factor.

The Village of Scarsdale, with its strong school system and common interests, deserves the representation of a single legislator in each of the Assembly, Senate, and U.S. Congressional districts.  We hope that the Commission takes its charge seriously and listens to the public so that it can draw political boundaries that are in the public’s best interest.

Sincerely,

Alissa Baum

President, League of Women Voters of Scarsdale

