

TO: The New York State Independent Redistricting Commission

RE: Keep Columbia County Whole in AD107 – Proposed Minor Adjustments to the IRC Draft Assembly District Map

February 4, 2023

Dear IRC Commissioners,

Thank you for your diligent work on the difficult task of creating new Assembly districts. I appreciate that you have proposed draft maps and have allowed ample time for public comment.

My name is Caitlin Curtin. I live in Columbia County, in the rural farming-oriented town of Clermont. Clermont is one of the county's southernmost towns and borders on Dutchess County. My poor town of Clermont is split into three different school districts and four different post offices, all in multiple towns, across two different counties and multiple towns. This has a huge, negative impact on our community cohesion and ability to work together as neighbors to solve problems and support each other. We have no natural center.

I was pleased to see that, for the first time since I've lived here, most of Columbia County is finally placed in one Assembly District, the proposed 107 AD, along with all/part of other counties with which we share governmental boundaries, business, workforce, touristic, environmental and community ties.

For decades, Columbia County has suffered as it has been separated into two (106, 107) or even three (102, 106 and 107) Assembly Districts. (My town has been previously placed in AD106.)

I appreciate that every municipality included in the proposed new AD 107 is located in the 7th State Regional District, the Capitol Region Empire State Development District, the Department of Environmental Conservation's Region 3 district, as well as in the 3rd New York State Judicial District and the US Court Northern District.

But I was distressed and shocked to see that the two towns of Columbia County, Ancram and Gallatin, with populations of only approximately 3,600, were not included in the proposed AD 107, thus splitting them off from the rest of Columbia County.

Instead, the IRC placed these two small towns in a proposed AD106 Mid-Hudson Valley and Dutchess County-focused district.

Keep Columbia County within Existing State, Regional, County, Judicial and Local Boundaries

This proposed new AD 106 district places Ancram and Gallatin with towns that are in different counties, in a different state region (in the 8th rather than the 7th),

Empire State Development region (the Mid-Hudson Valley, rather than Capital District) and in different judicial districts (the 9th NYS Court District rather than the 3rd NYS Court District; the US Court Southern District vs. the Northern District).

Removing these towns from AD107 and placing them in the proposed new AD106 also groups them with towns that are in a different Department of Environmental Conservation district — Region 3, Lower Hudson Valley, composed of Dutchess, Orange, Putnam, Rockland, Sullivan, Ulster and Westchester counties — rather being grouped with its AD107 peers in Region 4, the Capitol Region/Northern Catskills, composed of Albany, Columbia, Delaware, Greene, Montgomery, Otsego, Rensselaer, Schenectady and Schoharie counties.

Also of special note is that by placing these two small towns in an Assembly District (AD 106) that is in another county, they will not be able to benefit from the new Myrie Voting Rights law, designed to improve voter access, colloquially called “right church, wrong pew,” as they would NOT be using the ballots used in the rest of Columbia County (AD107).

Keep All of Columbia County Together With Its Existing Communities of Interest

The communities in the IRC’s proposed AD106 are much different than those in the proposed AD107: the proposed AD106 communities are more suburban and have strong community and workforce ties to the Dutchess county seat of Poughkeepsie and other larger southern towns.

Unlike the communities in the IRC’s proposed AD106, Columbia County has a largely family farm, tourism and arts-driven economy. The Columbia county communities in the proposed AD107, many of which are rural “right to farm” communities, are typically much smaller, more rural in nature and infrastructure (or the lack thereof). They have their strongest community and workforce ties to the Columbia county seat of Hudson and the nearby regional hubs of Catskill and Albany.

The communities in the IRC’s proposed new AD107, in addition to sharing the governmental boundaries noted previously, share other similarities:

- In much of the proposed AD107 district, there are many family and small farms and dairies, run as businesses, rather than as operated country “gentle-person farmer” or “horsey” properties that are more common in the proposed new AD106.
- There are current and long-standing intra- and cross-county community collaborations focused on re-purposing former industrial sites along the Hudson River and elsewhere into touristic venues and thriving “walkable” workforce and elder housing communities.
- There is a great deal of existing community collaboration on issues and

advocacy related to GE Hudson River PCB and other pollution remediation/prevention projects.

- The area business, community organization and workforce ties are to Hudson, Catskill and Albany, not to Poughkeepsie and towns south.
- Increasingly, due to the closure or reduction in local rural services, residents of Columbia County get both acute and chronic care from affiliates of Albany medical centers (Columbia Memorial Hospital is now an affiliate of Albany Med) or directly from Albany area providers. This brings very specific challenges regarding access to care.
- Notably Columbia County has especially strong ties with its proposed AD107 partner, Greene County, as evidenced by the following organizations — and this is a far from exhaustive list:
 - Columbia-Greene Community College
 - Columbia-Greene Humane Society
 - Columbia & Greene County Chambers of Commerce’s Leadership Program
 - Athens-Hudson Lighthouse
 - Hudson-Catskill Housing Association
 - Hudson-Catskill Music Teachers Association
 - United Way of Columbia-Greene County
 - Columbia-Greene Board of Realtors
 - Catholic Charities of Columbia-Greene
 - Mental Health Association of Columbia-Greene
 - Greene-Columbia County Bank
 - Albany-Hudson Electric Trail (runs to Rensselaer)

Columbia County Faces Challenges Similar to Our Proposed AD107 Peers

Columbia County has challenges that echo those of in our proposed AD107 peers:

- We lack affordable housing — and we have many derelict rural properties not connected to water and sewer systems, in addition to vacant riverfront sites requiring redevelopment and remediation.
- We face an opioids & substance abuse crisis in our working age population.
- Our community struggles with healthcare costs, staffing and availability.
- We struggle with workforce development and retention in all sectors.
- We have a deteriorating physical infrastructure with an insufficient public transportation for its geographically widely dispersed workforce (including agricultural workers), youth and elders.

- We need to implement climate change mitigation to protect our people and our farm economy.
- We need to increase renewable energy options both to lessen our reliance on expensive, polluting fossil fuels as well as to provide community economic development opportunities. As a largely rural district, we face challenges and opportunities distinct from the more suburban, densely populated proposed AD106.
- We rely upon a vibrant, clean Hudson River and thus need to ensure continuing environmental remediation of past damage by polluters and prevent future damage

Representation Matters to Columbia County and its Communities of Interest

Keeping Columbia County whole, including the towns of Ancram and Gallatin, in the new proposed AD107 gives all Columbia County residents representation by an elected official is deeply focused on our area's needs and who is familiar with the agencies active in our region. Thus our elected representative can be effective and productive advocate for the county's interests through legislation and governmental grants, earmarks and other funding allocations.

Removing Ancram and Gallatin from the new AD107 and placing them, and only these two Columbia County, Capital District region towns, in the new AD106, would make it harder for these towns to be integrated with the rest of the county. It would be more difficult to get productive assistance from an AD106 representative, as their focus and familiarity would be primarily with the Mid-Hudson Valley region agencies and with Dutchess County issues. It would be challenging for their elected Assembly District 106 representative to be familiar with the available funding from Capital District region grants, earmarks.

Suggested Changes to the IRC's Proposed Map of AD107 - Improved Compactness, Contiguity and Community of Interest Groupings

Proposed Map: <https://districtr.org/plan/167579>

We respectfully request that the IRC make minor adjustments to their AD107 proposed map because doing would unite the district's strongest communities of interest and more strongly complies with its own founding legislative directives, in bold, as follows:

- 1) Placing the Southern Columbia County towns of Ancram and Gallatin and their approximate 3600 residents in AD 107 keeps them within **existing state, regional, county, judicial and agency boundaries**.
- 2) Placing Ancram and Gallatin in AD 107 keeps them **within their community of interest of Columbia County** — which is, as discussed previously, quite different from the wealthier and more ex-urban/suburban southern-oriented

Mid-Hudson Valley proposed AD106.

- 3) Placing Ancram and Gallatin in AD107 makes the AD107 district **more compact**, and allows for better constituent access to their representative, who would be more knowledgeable about the resources available to these towns.
- 4) We feel it is critical for Ancram and Gallatin to **remain with their county and regional peers**, with which are their **strongest communities of interest** and with which they undertake many projects.
- 5) We suggest that the IRC remove from the proposed new AD107 some towns far west of the river and in the Catskill Mountains, as shown at the end of a “thumb” in the IRC proposed AD 107 map, by placing those communities more **compactly** with their peer mountain town focused Assembly district/s.
- 6) This would also keep those mountain towns closer to their own **communities of interest**, as they share challenges and opportunities very different from the down slope rural communities nearer to the Hudson River. This adjustment will also make the rather large AD107 district more **compact**.
- 7) Further, we suggest, as our proposed map shows, a small change to the proposed AD107 Northern borders, making the proposed AD107 **more compact and contiguous**. This change also keeps **communities of interest** together: this new proposed AD107 would include both northern ex-urban towns (where the workforce is largely Hudson or Albany oriented) and rural communities (for example, Valatie, Kinderhook, East Greenbush, Sand Lake, Stephentown and New Lebanon.)
- 8) The suggested new AD107 map that we propose does **not deny or abridge racial or language minority rights, nor does it favor any particular political party or incumbent**. The changes also **do not make major changes to the IRC’s proposed adjacent assembly districts**.
- 9) It would result in an AD with a **deviation of .66%** and a population of **133,789**.

In summary, while this proposed AD107 map makes only minor changes to the IRC’s own proposed AD107 map, these proposed changes would have a hugely beneficial impact for Columbia County. It also would improve the new proposed district’s adherence to the redistricting principles set out by the IRC’s founding legislation.

Thank you for your hard work and for your thoughtful consideration of this request.

Sincerely,
Caitlin Curtin
Clermont (Columbia County) New York