

I am concerned that the efforts of the New York State Independent Redistricting Commission are focused on appeasement instead of true representation. Your website states you examine and consider “Communities of Interest”, yet draft plans and actions appear more concerned with demographics despite community. Why would anyone consider an inner-city neighborhood with polar-opposite ethnic, financial, and social demographics to fall within the same “Community of Interest” with suburban-rural agriculturally centric residents?

Born and raised in northwest Monroe County, I grew up surrounded by farms in close proximity to the Lake Ontario shoreline. Over the past two census cycles my representation in Albany has shifted in its geographic area of coverage, creating a new demographic dynamic that stretches the ability to truly represent all citizens in this morphed district. My family and neighbors are now marginalized by representatives seeking to appease urban-suburban social issues instead of truly being able to care for – and effectively represent – their entire constituency.

The Village of Hilton and Towns of Hamlin, Parma, and the Town of Greece Lakeshore district share a common history. From one-room ‘district’ schools that later became the Hilton Central School District, to one of the most prolific fruit growing regions of the United States, we are still centered through all-volunteer fire districts and century-old service organizations like the Masons and the American Legion. We’ve watched the ebb and flow of Lake Ontario threaten our shoreline, but we bonded as neighbors – as a community – to fight back the threat to our homes and livelihood. We celebrate with decades-old festivals, carnivals, parades, and holiday celebrations; we keep alive the traditions of our settlers – seventh and eighth generation families – yet welcome our surrounding communities, including our urban-suburban neighbors. While we are a growing blend of many cultures, we are still a distinct community vastly different from the urban-suburban communities of Rochester, Irondequoit, Gates, and eastern/southern Greece.

Your map planning is driven by numbers, not ‘community’. If it were truly driven by communities of interest you would examine, in greater detail, existing Election Districts, school districts, fire protection districts, and individual neighborhoods to see where the population changed. I understand and support the need for balanced representation, but proposed plans appear to ignore similar communities of interests in western Monroe and eastern Orleans counties and simply seek to add areas with population density from distinctly opposite communities of interest in and along the northwest wards of Rochester and Greece. This is a slap in the face to these long-established rural-suburban towns and villages, nullifying any hope of true equal representation. The work of the Independent Redistricting Commission is viewed as shallow and politically serving instead of citizen serving.

These self-centered, politically gerrymandered district plans counter your stated planning factor of “ensuring that redrawn districts do not harm voters of color, and that communities of interest are preserved.” We are all “People of Color” so stop using labels to justify your weak decisions. Can you honestly say it is fair to break up an inner city or urban-suburban neighborhood and group them with rural agricultural residents? If no, then why are you seeking to merge ethnically diverse people in an agricultural, rural-suburban community of interest with ethnically diverse people in a completely different urban-suburban community of interest? Both have distinct socio-economic needs that cannot be effectively represented by one side or the other. They each need representation that comes from within their socio-economic community of interest, not something that politicians say they need to improve two-party politics.

In the end, I would rather see people from multiple parties within **my community** earn my vote and respect. Your current plans seeks to exacerbate the political divide between neighboring communities and socio-economic needs by making the representation based on urban-suburban versus rural-suburban voter turnout and not true community of interest representation you advertise.