

Written Testimony of
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Generation Vote

Submitted to The Independent Redistricting Commission of New York State

November 1, 2021

I would like to thank the members of The Independent Redistricting Commission of New York State for the opportunity to testify and speak to the proposed Congressional and State Legislature lines as they pertain to the Capital District. My name is Brendan Cushing, I am a 24 year old SUNY Ualbany graduate, and for the past six years, I have been living, organizing, and most importantly voting in the capital region of the great state of New York. With years of experience organizing young people on Congressional and state electoral campaigns, I would like to speak to the importance of keeping the current Congressional map which keeps Capital District communities of interest together.

Firstly, I would like to highlight the importance and necessity of an independent redistricting process and congratulate the state legislature for taking the initiative to ensure that our state and Congressional district lines are drawn independently and fairly. The last time that state and Congressional districts were drawn in New York was 2010. At the time, the New York State Legislature had a direct say in the redrawing of the district lines, and the lines were drawn disproportionately and in a partisan manner. When speaking of the 2010 redistricting process, State Senator Michael Gianaris stated that the drawn lines were “grossly unfair and resulted in some of the most gerrymandered maps in the country.”¹

Traditionally, and in most states across the country, whichever party is in control of the state legislature has a grand incentive to redraw district lines in such a way that benefits the party. This is precisely why independent redistricting commissions are critical to ensuring transparency and genuine representation in our democracy. Independent redistricting commissions are a voter-centric reform used to ensure that voters — not politicians — decide how electoral districts are drawn. Several states, such as Utah, California, Iowa, Missouri, and more have implemented independent redistricting commissions, and as a result voters in the aforementioned states have

¹ Goldmacher, S. (2021, April 26). New York loses House seat after coming up 89 people short on census. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/26/nyregion/new-york-census-congress.html>.

seen electoral districts that comply with the Voting Rights Act of 1965, have equal population distribution, respect geographical and political boundaries, and more.²

In addition to speaking to the importance of an independent redistricting process, I want to speak to the importance of ensuring that the New York State Independent Redistricting Commission recognizes that Albany, Schenectady, Saratoga, Rensselaer and Montgomery counties fall within the same Congressional district. For starters, each of these counties are geographically cohesive - they border one another, and the socioeconomic and political conditions that affect these counties are uniform across the region.

Additionally, each of these counties are tied together economically and by dense transportation networks. Each of these counties that define the core of the capital region contain cities that are economically interconnected and reliant on one another for longevity. I grew up on Long Island but currently live in the center square neighborhood of the city of Albany, and I love my city and all that it has to offer. Nevertheless, my friends and I frequently travel to Saratoga Springs, Ballston Spa, Troy, Schenectady Amsterdam, and more locations in the capital region to try new restaurants, shop at our favorite stores, enjoy nightlife at the bars, participate in the free concerts, farmers markets, and public events that take place throughout the region, and much more. When I tell people I live in the capital region, I say it with pride - to me the capital region isn't just the city of Albany. To me, and in my experience, the capital region consists of a number of different cities and locations through the above-mentioned counties, and I couldn't fathom the region being split up into different districts.

Furthermore, each of these counties are tied together by the Capital District Transportation Authority (CDTA) which provides readily available public transportation throughout the counties and the cities that fall within them. The CDTA was established in 1970 and provides service for more than 800,000 people who live and work in the region, transporting more than 55,000 customers each weekday.³ The extensive public transportation available to folks within the capital region is yet another example of the socioeconomic infrastructure that holds that capital region together and a clear example of why it would be devastating not to keep these counties together in the same Congressional district.

Finally, keeping these counties together with predictable, stable boundaries promotes good representation and governance. As you can surely see, the economic, social, and political conditions and needs of each of these counties overlap significantly with one another, and the

² Campaign Legal Center . (n.d.). *Independent redistricting commissions*. Campaign Legal Center. <https://campaignlegal.org/democracy/accountability/independent-redistricting-commissions>.

³ CDTA. (n.d.). *Capital district Transportation Authority*. Capital District Transportation Authority (CDTA). <https://www.cdta.org/history>.

capital region as a whole deserves to be kept in the same Congressional district so that we as a region can continue to have a champion in Congress who fights day after day for our shared geographic interests.

In conclusion, I want to thank The Independent Redistricting Commission of New York State once more for the opportunity to testify, and I strongly believe and recommend that the commission keep the current Congressional map which keeps Capital District communities of interest together.

Thank You.

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