**Testimony of
Denise Murphy McGraw, Community Activist**

My name is Denise Murphy McGraw and I have been an active member of the Niskayuna, Schenectady County community – having served as a town board member, chairwoman of the SUNY Schenectady board of trustees, president of the Junior League, president of the Star Fish Swim Club, host of a weekly public affairs television program called Community Conversations, and vice president of the Niskayuna Friends of Music.  This is the second time I have appeared before this commission regarding an Assembly redistricting plan. The first time was in November of 2021. Many of my same concerns I had then exist for this new plan unveiled by the commission recently.

Ours is a tightly woven, small community where everyone knows their neighbors, supports their local small businesses, and sees each other at community events throughout our town and the communities we are closest with. These include Colonie, Schenectady and Guilderland.

·     I am truly concerned by the proposal to divide Niskayuna into two separate Assembly districts. To me and many others, it seems unnecessarily cruel and a blatant attempt to dimmish our community spirit and government clout.

Niskayuna is a town of 15 square miles that is home to about 23,000 people. For decades, it was a bedroom community of Schenectady. Most of our residents worked at General Electric in Downtown Schenectady. Today, just as many or more residents travel to Albany each day to work for the state, this university, or other large regional employers.

I have lived in Niskayuna for 27 years. That is long enough to have gone through the redistricting process more than once. Ten years ago, when the new 110th AD was drawn, people were surprised. I was not. The district made perfect sense. Better sense than ever before.

The 110th AD is really one community that represents well the spirit of cooperation embodied in the Capital Region. The district is connected by Routes 5 and 7 as well as the Mohawk River and, best of all, a magnificent biking and walking trail that is a crown jewel of the region. If you visit Niskayuna’s Lion’s Park on the Mohawk River, you will see just as many Colonie and Schenectady residents enjoying all it has to offer. Same can be said of River Road Park.

Though I am disappointed Schenectady was lost as part of the Assembly district, pairing Colonie and Niskayuna with Guilderland is appropriate. There is shared a common interest in that we have been centers of chain immigration for approximately twenty years. Numbers of foreign-born residents have risen to over 11% in each town and are still growing. This has seen a growth both in our economy in small businesses, which service these communities and in the professional services industries as well. Our school districts welcome them with open arms and we have had the support of our assembly representative in ensuring our schools have the services available in ESL and social services.

Our schools work together every day to educate our region’s children. Residents of Niskayuna attend Colonie Schools and Colonie residents attend Niskayuna Schools.

The three local governments collaborate on issues of water, sewers, roads, zoning, and recreational facilities. The strong relationship between the three has helped residents, contractors, and others cut through red tape and has helped us achieve greater efficiencies.

We also enjoy prosperous economies driven by retail establishments that serve all three municipalities well.

Assemblyman Phil Steck’s leadership in bringing together Niskayuna, Colonie and Schenectady to secure grants, pass local legislation needed to address retirement problems and other matters, and navigate state government should be commended. Niskayuna is a better place thanks to the hard work of Assemblyman Steck and his staff.

Thank you for allowing me to participate today. I am happy to answer questions.

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