Testimony from Karen D. Conti, resident of Lewisboro (South Salem), NY.

November 6, 2021

Dear Commissioners:

As a former School Board President of the Katonah-Lewisboro School District (KLSD), I have a unique perspective on how important it is for school districts to stay within the same Assembly District whenever possible. There is substantial collaboration that must happen on all levels of government, especially when a school district is spread out over more than one town or municipality. The Katonah-Lewisboro School district is one such school district, encompassing all of the Town of Lewisboro and a section of Bedford.  KLSD was unified nearly 70 years ago, in 1952, when the Katonah School, now Katonah Elementary School, joined Lewisboro School District. Approximately 1/3 of all elementary school students and about 1/4 or 750 of the 3,000 students enrolled are Katonah (Bedford) residents. KLSD is a member of the Westchester County Superintendents Association and the Westchester County School Board Association.

In the recent redistricting maps, Lewisboro is separated from Bedford, which I don’t believe has ever been the case before in the Assembly. I see this as a real disadvantage for school district management and the delivery of services, especially for the students and families who will be affected by dividing representation between two Assembly Members from different Counties and communities who must then closely coordinate to ensure all students and families have the same services, programs, and funding opportunities. From a practical perspective, I question how a grant or program from a Westchester or Putnam County Assembly Member would be allocated within the school district. Children sitting next to each other in class would have different representation: how might that impact student success?

Even apart from the school district, Lewisboro families have very strong connections and cultural ties with the bordering towns of Bedford, especially Katonah, Pound Ridge, and North Salem. As a 29-year resident who raised my family in Lewisboro, I know that we share many water and wetland issues specific to our particular section of Westchester County. The 5 Northeastern Westchester Towns also share recreational, social, and judicial programming, services and supports originating from Westchester County. The County, Bedford and Lewisboro have been collaborating for decades.

Lastly, as a Westchester County resident whose Assembly District has always been wholly contained in Westchester County, I think it makes the most sense for Lewisboro to stay in an Assembly District wholly in Westchester County. the school district's orientation has always been toward Westchester County. An Assemblymember from Putnam County would have virtually no knowledge of the 100's of years of Katonah Lewisboro co-dependence.

I understand that sometimes districts are split between counties, but I think it’s best to avoid that whenever possible.

Thank you.

Yours truly,

Karen D. Conti

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