

Hello my name is Lars Dahl and I am a resident of the City of Albany. I will be speaking today on behalf of the League of Women Voters of Albany County, a non-partisan political organization working to protect and expand voting rights for the last 100 years.

As I testified at the last hearing, Albany County has had a complicated relationship with redistricting so it is of the utmost importance that redistricting is done properly this time. The Commission has continued to make improvements, but more can be made. The League would also like to comment on the proposed map by the MMD Subcommittee.

The first area for that we would like to see improvement on is transparency. Since we last testified, the Commission has made a lot of progress on this front by posting meeting minutes and streaming the committee meetings on YouTube. We also applaud the Commission for putting the MORE mapping software on the Albany County website so that the public can draw maps using the program the Commission will be using.

However, there is still more room for improvement.

The public still does not have access to the MMD Sub Committee Meeting minutes, video recordings or access to any of the other sub committee meeting materials. This is very important for the public to have so that we can see how the MMD Districts are being drawn in more detail and what the Commission thinks about them.

We would also like to see the milestone timeline that the Commission uses posted on the website so that it is easier for the public to access than watching hearing videos.

Lastly, the Commission still needs to work on engaging more people across the county.

The League of Women Voters also would like to recommend that the Commission does not get stuck in the mindset that only small changes should be made to the existing districts and that all changes should solely be made to account for population deviation. This mindset is reinforced by the fact that any map drawn

with MORE has to start with the existing districts as a baseline. Under New York State's County redistricting law, it is just as important to consider communities of interest as it is to minimize changes to the old districts. Furthermore, the current lines are not the best districts that can be drawn. In the City of Albany alone, the vast majority of neighborhoods are split into multiple districts.

As part of the changes that should be made to the existing map, the League of Women Voters believes that the growth of the nonwhite population necessitates the creation of at least 6 MMD districts. Given that the nonwhite population makes up 9% more of the population than they did in the prior census, we feel the creation of at least 1 new Minority Majority District is appropriate.

The creation of a 6th district would ensure that more Minority voices are heard and may necessitate making significant changes to the existing districts in order to create more Majority Minority Districts. These changes to the map would be justified because New York State's County Redistricting law places protecting Minority voters as the second highest priority for the Commission - only creating districts that have similar numbers of people living in them is more important.

As the last part of our testimony today, I would like to comment on the map proposed by the MMD Subcommittee. We applaud the MMD Subcommittee for drawing a map with the intent of having at least 6 MMD Districts. However, League of Women Voters is concerned that their newly drawn 7th district will not result in creating an additional MMD. In the last Albany County Redistricting court case (*Pope v. County of Albany*), it was established that for the purposes of the Voting Rights Act, Black and Hispanic voters were Minority voters in Albany. That definition did not include Asian, Native American or any other group as Minority voters in Albany County. Depending on what your voting rights expert Dr. Lisa Handley finds in her research, the definition of Minority voter could potentially be expanded to include all nonwhite voters. If all nonwhite voters were counted as minority voters, there is potential for up to 9 MMDs. For now, we would encourage the Commission to keep the existing definition that only counts Black and Hispanic voters as Minority voters until we hear otherwise from the expert. If, however, the Commission adopts a more broad definition, we ask the Commission to make that decision public.

Under the existing definition of Minority voters in Albany County as per the 2015 lawsuit (just Black and Hispanic Voters), proposed district 7 is 38.68% minority voters and 48.93% white. The Minority population would be significantly less than the white population in the district. In addition, primary electorates are historically much whiter than general elections. In the proposed district 7 where the winner of the Democratic party primary will likely be the winner of the election, it will be even harder for a Minority candidate to be elected. To that end, the League would like to see district 7 be about 5% more Black and Hispanic and 5% less white to be in a better position to meet that goal.

Outside of the issue of district 7 not having enough Minority votes to be considered an MMD, there are other concerns with the map proposed by the MMD Subcommittee. The map seems to be an attempt to make as few changes to the existing districts as possible instead of focusing on the communities of interest which is an equally important priority. Many neighborhoods are split in this map, most notably the Delaware Avenue neighborhood is split into three districts. Other neighborhoods that are badly split up include Washington Square, the Warehouse district, Beverwyck and the South End. The village of Menands is also unnecessarily split in this map and around 250 residents from Menands are in a district where that is otherwise entirely in the city of Albany. This is by no means a list of every community split by the proposed maps and I encourage the MMD Subcommittee to consider different ways maps can be drawn that better represent communities of interest and have at least 6 proper MMDs.

Thank you for your time and for listening to my testimony. I encourage the Commission to ask questions of not just myself but also of other people testifying so the Commission can further engage with the public. Thanks again, and I am open to questions as always.