

TESTIMONY TO THE ALBANY COUNTY REDISTRICTING COMMISSION PUBLIC HEARING 5PM

August 4th, 2022

SUBMITTED BY Matthew Peter, Albany County Legislator of the 5th district and resident of the 6th Ward in the City of Albany residing at 213 Lancaster Street, Albany NY 12210.

To the members of the ACRC and MM, I have been a resident of Albany County for 18 years and of the Center Square neighborhood for over eight years. I first lived at 352 State Street and then purchased my home at 213 Lancaster Street two years ago. Throughout my time in the Fifth Legislative District, which also represents the entirety of the City of Albany's Sixth Ward, I have realized how interconnected a community of interest we truly are. This district and the community of interest it represents is a unique neighborhood with numerous common causes and, as such, both city and county level advocacy are integral parts of its makeup.

I had previously submitted comments to the public hearing that took place on June 30th, 2022, but it appears all public comment from myself and many concerned citizens were unfortunately ignored. Most of what I am sending is a rehashing of what I had previously submitted but the issues raised have not changed and in fact the latest maps make most things worse.

I am also disturbed by the process. Not only has public comment seemingly been ignored, but the committee seems to have come to a conclusion that regardless of other considerations 2 new minority majority districts needed to be added. In doing so the committee ignored all communities of interest or municipal boundaries to accomplish the committee's agenda without a significant population increase that justifies such an expansion. In fact, 2 of the 7 proposed minority majority districts have under 50% voting population that identifies as a minority, while dividing other communities of interest. In addition, other existing minority majority districts were diluted to accomplish this. To justify these actions, and make sure the remaining 5 districts had a little over 50% minority voting populations, communities of interest were split, municipal boundaries were ignored and clearly gerrymandered districts were created. It also appears that the committee decided to treat all minority populations as monoliths that would vote together regardless of existing communities of interest and municipal areas that they reside in. The process was also quite delayed as the committee wanted to have maps submitted by June and the communication with the public on the process and next steps left a lot to be desired.

The Fifth Legislative District, which I happen to be lucky enough to represent in the county legislature, encompasses numerous key organizations, including a majority of the Washington Park Neighborhood Association, the Park South Neighborhood Association, the Hudson Park Neighborhood Association, the Center Square Association, the Lark Street Business Improvement District, In Our Own Voices, the Pride Center of the Capital Region, and Washington Park. All of these neighborhood associations work together on issues including walkability, public safety, neighborhood/historic preservation, and mental health crisis response, particularly given our proximity to Albany Medical Center and the Capital District Psychiatric Center. Splitting these neighborhood associations, which geographically border each other and have worked together for decades, decreases their collective voice and destroys an important part of this community of interest.

The Lark Street Business Improvement District is also almost entirely in the Fifth Legislative District. The COVID-19 crisis in particular has shown the necessity of consistent, concise, and coordinated governmental response and representation in order for businesses to survive and succeed. Splitting the business district artificially into three separate parts would create confusion and harm the business district's ability to be properly represented. Given the economic and cultural growth that is occurring

around Lark Street and its surrounding neighborhood, this could be quite detrimental to furthering the economic progress occurring in the Capital District as a whole.

Additionally, Washington Park serves as an important unique cultural center and a center of this area's community of interest. The neighborhoods surrounding the park (all mentioned above) utilize the park, volunteer at the conservancy and work tirelessly in maintaining and preserving the park. County lines which divide the park and Lark Street from the neighborhoods which utilize and connect with it is a disservice to the residents and also threatens the interconnectedness of the neighborhood.

Furthermore, Albany County's Fifth Legislative District and the Sixth Ward of the City of Albany represent a significant part of the LGBTQ+ community. Both the Pride Center of the Capital Region and In Our Own Voices are headquartered in the Fifth Legislative District; community sponsored queer events such as the Pride Parade and festival, Santa Speedo Run, and Say it Loud Black and Latino Gay Pride all occur in the Fifth Legislative District. The current proposed maps divide these organizations and events from common coordination and representation.

The final map pointedly ignores the communities of interest that are all united in the current Albany County Fifth Legislative District. My interest in this issue has nothing to do with personal representation but the knowledge that dividing this district would lead to divided representation and harm a community of interest that has worked together in common cause for generations.

I humbly request that you keep these points in mind when submitting a final map.

Respectfully yours,

Matthew Peter