



**August 4, 2022**

**STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE PRIDE CENTER OF THE CAPITAL REGION TO THE ALBANY COUNTY REDISTRICTING COMMISSION PUBLIC HEARING**

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**SUBMITTED BY Nathaniel Gray, MSW, Executive Director of the Pride Center of the Capital Region located at 332 Hudson Ave. Albany, NY 12210**

As the new Executive Director of the Pride Center of the Capital Region, I hold dear the long and important history of the LGBTQ+ community in the Center Square area. While I am newer to the community, every major city has an historically relevant neighborhood to the LGBTQ+ community, and in fact, these communities are often still a landing pad for LGBTQ+ folks seeking safe and affirming housing when relocating for work or education. When moving myself, I had to consider my own personal safety; the streets of Center Square are a rare pocket of the broader city of Albany where I don't look over my shoulder, concerned someone will choose to interrupt my day with verbal or physical violence because I happen to be gay. It also cannot be overlooked that a great many of the pioneers of the LGBTQ+ movement in Albany still live on these blocks and in these homes; they are the reason this is a safe environment in the first place and their voices are irreplaceable. The importance of this history is even more notable given that the existing district houses both the Pride Center of the Capital Region, the longest continually operating Pride Center in the country, as well as In Our Own Voices, a New York State recognized leader in LGBTQ+ work with Black, Indigenous and other Peoples of Color.

I am providing this context today for the hearing on the proposed maps, as it seems from the placement of the lines that the redistricting body may not have been aware of this rich and vital history. This history is especially important as there is a naked attack on the rights and freedoms of all marginalized peoples, and the LGBTQ+ community sits in the crosshairs of those tactics. Our existence is often seen as fringe or eccentric, and most recently has been labeled as "grooming," the notion that by talking to a child about the fact that being LGBTQ+ is normal, that we exist, we are in fact somehow pedophiles. While this may seem superfluous to the map drawing process, it is not. If the queer voices of the heart of Center Square are split, the collective voice of our community cannot unite to not only combat this kind of rhetoric, but also the ability to select candidates who reject the centrist notion that being LGBTQ+ is anything but 100% normal and something to be respected. Our politics are not woke; our politics are about survival and we need every voice to be heard for our rights and freedoms to be protected.

This concept isn't new. In fact, the legendary figure Harvey Milk was forced to fight for years to change the lines of the districts of San Francisco in order to eventually become one of the first publicly elected LGBTQ+ people in the country. The LGBTQ+ community of San Francisco, just like every other major city, was comprised of queer folks who left their home town or state to find a few blocks of safety.



When they found it, they found family, safety, and eventually, a collective voice. Their collective voice was of little use when their votes were cast in multiple districts. Their collective needs were ignored by the rest of the town's council because they had no champion to fight for their cause. Their collective voice was heard when they finally had a true representative of their experience in a position of power. Splitting our vote today is a refusal to learn from the past, and if it continues under this knowledge, could be seen as an attack on our franchise.

By drawing lines that divide the voices of the historic LGBTQ+ voice, the proposed map is either intentionally or ignorantly diluting the voting power and strength in numbers of a community who literally have no other historically safe spaces to live in Albany. By dividing the two major Pride Centers in Albany, our organization and In Our Own Voices, the proposed map is splintering the advocate voices of the community we serve. By ignoring this to create less progressive, less LGBTQ+ safe districts, the proposed map will prevent our community from voting for champions of our cause. The Pride Center of the Capital Region implores you to reconsider the proposed map, and to return to district lines that reflect the decades long fight the LGBTQ+ community has had to maintain in order to have a safe and affirming neighborhood to seek prosperity in.

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