

Sean E. Ward written testimony to Albany County Redistricting Commission, most of which was presented in person on 10/27/2022:

I would first like to state again that I have a great deal of respect for the MMD Sub-Committee and Albany County Redistricting Committee members and the time and effort you have provided toward this very difficult and time-consuming task. I am grateful for your service to our County. I am providing these comments as someone who has served as Chair of the Commission previously and have been a part of this process three times. I know it is not an easy task.

In looking at numbers provided to us, it appears to me that the Black/Hispanic numbers are low in a few of the MMD's which would put them at risk of losing some of the seats. History over the last 20 years would support this. Lowering the number of MMD's to 5 or 6 with more concentration of B/H voters, without packing, would assume greater chance of minority representation in those areas. **Success should not be measured by the number of designated districts, but by the number of those that successfully elect minority representatives.** In the last two decades, the court has ordered the County to add MMD's and in the last two decades minority candidates have lost in MMD's due to thin majority of B/H voters. All of the members of our Black Caucus and the majority of the Legislature realize this and share these concerns.

The first draft presented to the public was very good as it did create 5 strong MMD's and kept most communities of interest outside of the MMD's together instead of cut in half as the subsequent draft and final map did. There is no question that adding additional MMD's after the first draft contributed to the direction of the communities of interest that I will reference below, more specifically in the 16th District. It is also possible that some of the Albany/Menands neighborhoods could be amended (minor corrections) in the first draft to keep those communities in interest intact. As far as the MMD's, if we look at the census data for those districts and compare it to the numbers of Black and B/H voters you will see that the numbers presented now are

much weaker than they were in 2015. A map of the 2015 MMD's provided to all of us at the Legislature's Public Hearing showed it.

### **16<sup>th</sup> Legislative District:**

The City of Watervliet is one of only three cities in Albany County, has a high needs population, and did not lose population in the 2020 Census. They should not lose a representative as proposed in the last version. The 1<sup>st</sup> draft had three districts within the municipal boundaries, the submitted version had two. Mayor Patricelli and other city officials and citizens, including a few that wrote letters to the commission prior to their public hearing, have been very vocal about the fact that they could lose a representative. **I spoke to the commission about this at their last public hearing.**

1. Ethnic neighborhoods Community of Interest-North end of Watervliet (from 23<sup>rd</sup> Street and north to border) still has a strong Ukrainian population and borders Maplewood, which still has a strong Russian population. The populations of these neighborhoods are very closely aligned, in fact most of them relocated here when they were both the same Country. The war overseas has bonded them even closer. Aligning these two areas again would make sense from a neighborhood perspective and would solve the issue of Watervliet losing a representative as well. **I spoke to the commission about this at their last public hearing.**

***Specific recommendation:** 23<sup>rd</sup> Street and north in the City of Watervliet to the city line has a very strong ethnic/Ukrainian population with St. Nicholas Ukrainian Church located at 24<sup>th</sup> Street and 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue and the Ukrainian American Citizens Club located at 25<sup>th</sup> Street and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Add this area in the 16<sup>th</sup> District as it was in the original, first draft.*

2. Maplewood Hamlet Community of Interest-I spoke to the commission at the last public hearing about a small section of the east side of Boght Road bordered by 25<sup>th</sup> Street in Watervliet, Elm Street and Crabapple Lane that was deleted in their proposal submitted before the public hearing. The commission realized this as an oversight and added that area back in the 16<sup>th</sup> District. However, in a corresponding move the commission deleted the small, adjacent Horton Avenue development which is located on the east side of Boght Road north of Elm Street. This is also considered a Maplewood district/neighborhood and is slightly larger in size than the original area of concern. The original draft submitted had both of these areas included in the 16<sup>th</sup> District keeping the Maplewood area intact.

***Specific Recommendation:*** Add the area on the east side of Boght Road, north of Elm Street and including Horton Avenue into the 16<sup>th</sup> District, as it was in the original, first draft.

3. Latham Ridge Neighborhood Community of Interest-The submitted version included an area west of Boght Road in the Town of Colonie that is part of the Latham Ridge neighborhood. While that area was split in half by the construction of Alternate Route 7 years ago it is still a viable neighborhood and has always been together in one district. It should not be divided in half. The first draft included a small area of this neighborhood in my district but the submitted version greatly expanded it. **I spoke to the commission about this at their last public hearing.**

***Specific Recommendation:*** Consider merging the west side of Boght Road from Alternate Route 7 to Johnson Road into the 20<sup>th</sup> District with the remainder of the Latham Ridge neighborhood. Although the original, first draft had a small portion of this area included into the 16<sup>th</sup> District, the area was greatly expanded in the final maps, literally cutting Latham Ridge in half. This could happen as the deviation % of the 20<sup>th</sup> District is low and the 16<sup>th</sup> District is high. I have spoken to the present 20<sup>th</sup> District representative and although he has stated nothing publicly, he has told me on more than one occasion that he was surprised that the neighborhood was cut in half.

Overall, as it relates to the 16<sup>th</sup> Legislative District, the first draft submitted by the commission was a very proper representation of our area of the County and kept all communities of interest intact. It wasn't until after the addition of additional MMD's in Albany/Menands that the maps were further altered from Albany and north along the river, resulting in these issues that I have pointed out above. Cutting back on the proposed MMD's, as our own Black Caucus recommends, and strengthening into at least 5-6 strong MMD's, as well as reverting the river districts back to where they were in the original proposal would go a long way toward solving most of the issues that I have presented.

Thank you for your time.

Sean Ward