



The League of Women Voters of New York State  
62 Grand Street, Albany, New York 12207  
Phone: 518-465-4162 Fax: 518-465-0812  
www.lwvny.org E-Mail: lwvny@lwvny.org

# THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS *of New York State*

## People's Hearing Testimonies

On Thursday, April 29<sup>th</sup>, the League of Women Voters of New York State held a virtual People's Hearing on New York State redistricting. The League invited members of the public and organizations representing diverse stakeholder groups from across New York State to testify or submit written testimony for our People's Hearing. Our participants presented testimonies on what communities of interest they represent, how that community has changed since the last Census, why redistricting is important to them, and how redistricting will impact their family and their community over the next 10 years.

Our oral testifiers included:

Fulvia Vargas-De Leon	Associate Counsel	LatinoJustice PRLDEF
Liz OuYang	Coordinator	APA VOICE Redistricting Task Force
Howard Wong	Civic Engagement Manager	Chinese-American Planning Council
Jerry Vattamala	Director, Democracy Program	Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund
Perry Grossman	Voting Rights Project Attorney	New York Civil Liberties Union
Julio Rivera	Civic Engagement Program Manager, National Programs	NALEO Educational Fund
Helen Hellmuth	Senior Advocate	Disability Rights New York
Asher Ross	Senior Strategist	New York Immigration Coalition
Emely Paez	Director of Government Affairs and Civic Engagement	Hispanic Federation
Sandra Choi	Civic Participation Manager	MinKwon Center for Community Action
Aminta Kilawan-Narine	Founder and Executive Director	South Queens Women's March
Ramdatt Singh	Director of Civic Engagement	Caribbean Equality Project
Mon Yuck Yu	Executive Vice-President and Chief of Staff	Academy of Medical Health and Public Services
Lurie Daniel-Favors	Executive Director	The Center for Law and Social Justice at Medgar Evers College, CUNY

Sue Ruff	Advocacy Director	Southern Tier Independence Center
April Land	Member	Capital Region One Person One Vote Coalition
Kathy Stein	President	League of Women Voters of St Lawrence County
Kathy Meany	President	League of Women Voters of Westchester County
Eileen Lilly	Member	League of Women Voters of Nassau County
Constance Stirling-Engman	Member	League of Women Voters of Tompkins County

A recording of our People’s Hearing is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dKDtHSprAc>

In addition to our oral testifiers, the League received six written testimonies. These testimonies were solicited using social media, email, and traditional media. The testimonies were submitted through a Google Form or via email. The submissions have not been edited or shortened in any way.

**Submissions included:**

- Henry and Julie Boyd, Carmel (page 3)
- Dr. Zulema Blair, Brooklyn (page 4)
- Karen V Emerson, Rochester (page 5)
- Joel E. Gingold, Croton-On-Hudson (pages 6 -7)
- Janet Goodsell, Grand Island (page 8)
- The League of Women Voters of the Syracuse Metropolitan Area (page 9)

The League also collected written comments from our testifiers that presented at the People’s Hearing.

**The League received written comments from the following testifiers:**

- Kathy Meany, Westchester, on behalf of the Westchester League of Women Voters (pages 10-11)
- Eileen Lilly, Long Beach, on behalf of the Nassau County League of Women Voters (page 12)
- The League of Women Voters of St. Lawrence County (pages 13-15)
- April Land, Capital District One Person One Vote Coalition (pages 16-17)
- Connie Sterling-Engman, League of Women Voters of Tompkins County (pages 18-19)
- Sue Ruff, Southern Tier Independence Center (pages 20-21)
- Fulvia Vargas-De Leon, LatinoJustice PRLDEF (pages 22-23)
- Emely Paez, Hispanic Federation (pages 24-25)

1054 Route 52  
Carmel, NY 10512

April 20, 2021

League of Women Voters of New York State  
62 Grand Street  
Albany, NY 12207  
Re: 2021 NYS Redistricting

Dear LWV Members and Redistricting Commission,

We are residences of Putnam County in the lower Hudson Valley region of New York State. As both league members and active members in our community through the Carmel-Kent Chamber of Commerce, we ask that you take a serious look at revising redistricting that has involved Putnam County. Currently, our county is split with not a rhyme or reason between 94<sup>th</sup> and 95<sup>th</sup> Assembly district and the 40<sup>th</sup> and 41<sup>st</sup> Senate District. Our small county has no voice. We are either tied to Westchester or Dutchess. We are not saying we have horrible representation from most of our Assemblypersons or Senators, but true be told they really do not care about us. Our county is split only for the purpose of political gains by both parties. It is not set up to represent our residents, our businesses, or our interests. We only see our one Senator at election times if she feels the need to grace us with her presences. I have seen on many occasions my Assemblywomen and know the Assemblyman that shares the other part of Putnam is seen quite often also.

We were asked what issues are not being address in Putnam that are impacted by the current gerrymandering of our county:

1. The paving of State roads – parts of the county get new roads and other sections have been pothole repaired to the point that it does damage to vehicles and are a hazard to drive.
2. Vaccine distribution – Putnam until recently was really ignored during early months of the distribution. Many of us had to go to Westchester, Dutchess, or Connecticut instead of locally.
3. Funding – Grants, projects, etc.
4. Assistance – Asking for assistance or support, we get put aside because basically, you can ignore us because our votes might not mean as much as the counties where you have a larger constituent.
5. Need representation that can handle our diversity which includes residential, tourism, manufacturing, and commercialism. All six towns in our county are unique but share certain similarities.

I am sure we are not the only county that is overrepresented but at the same time underrepresented. We ask that the Commission look at redrawing district lines to better represent the residents of New York State then the political parties.

Sincerely,  
*Henry & Julie Boyd*  
Henry and Julie Boyd

1. Name
Dr. Zulema Blair
2. Where do you reside in New York State? (You do not have to provide your full address - a town, village, city, or county name will suffice).
Brooklyn, NY
3. How would you describe the community of interest that you represent?
African American, West Indian, Continental Africans, and Afro-Latinos which are deeply impacting by NYC's housing and education infrastructure
4. Are there certain community needs or concerns that make your community unique to others in the state?
Housing, education, language assistance, and transportation
5. Do you believe that your legislative districts have been misdrawn or drawn to inadequately represent the people who live in your community? If yes, please explain.
Yes, the school districts and legislative districts are carved into many different "pockets" that do not serve the educational and housing needs of the communities that they serve. As a result effective advocacy do not come to fruition and these communities of interest remain vastly underserved.
6. What are issues in your community that you feel are not currently being addressed by your elected representatives?
Foreclosure prevention, access to healthcare facilities, property taxes for small property owners, educational needs for k - 12, and transportation.
7. Are there specific ways you would redraw your legislative districts to better represent the people who live in your community?
Yes
8. Do you have any additional comments about redistricting and how it may impact your community?
I am a researcher for the Center for Law and Social Justice (CLSJ) and feel that the data do not adequately speak to how communities of interest within the Black community are identified.

1. Name
Karen V Emerson
2. Where do you reside in New York State? (You do not have to provide your full address - a town, village, city, or county name will suffice).
ROCHESTER
3. Are there certain community needs or concerns that make your community unique to others in the state?
We currently struggle with lack of owner occupied homes, policing issues, some drug usage and LGBTQ flags being destroyed
4. Do you believe that your legislative districts have been misdrawn or drawn to inadequately represent the people who live in your community? If yes, please explain.
The 61st State Senate District encompasses: the Towns of Amherst, Clarence, and Newstead and the Villages of Akron and Williamsville in Erie County; the Towns of Chili and Riga, the Village of Churchville and part of the City of Rochester in Monroe County; and all of Genesee County.
5. What are issues in your community that you feel are not currently being addressed by your elected representatives?
Guns(illegal) and drugs. My representatives are currently addressing needs but I feel there can not be good representation of our small city part of the district since there are no other urban areas in the district. Because the portion of the is vastly out numbered by the eastern Buffalo suburbs and rural Genesee county.
6. Are there specific ways you would redraw your legislative districts to better represent the people who live in your community?
Of course, first and foremost to most effectively hear the voice of urban dwellers we must not continue to cut up cities into minute segments. This fractionization of the urban voice does no service to any one. "Urban problems" are everyone' s problems and will end up affecting not only urban dwellers but our rural and suburban neighbors eventually
7. Do you have any additional comments about redistricting and how it may impact your community?
With the last redistricting my family in Genesee County and I have been represented by the same person. The redistricting done after the last census created in my small neighborhood 2 districts so that Rath and Cooney represent us. This is really a duplication of time and money which could be used for other things.

**Joel E. Gingold**  
**55 Nordica Drive**  
**Croton-on-Hudson, NY 10520**  
**(914) 862-2300**      [jeaconsult@optonline.net](mailto:jeaconsult@optonline.net)

**TESTIMONY FOR LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS PEOPLE'S HEARING**

My name is Joel Gingold. I live at 55 Nordica Drive in Croton-on-Hudson, NY, 10520. I very much appreciate this opportunity to present my thoughts to the League of Women Voters People's Hearing. I do want to make it clear at the outset that I speak only for myself and not for any organization.

From the time I first registered to vote in 1959, I have been a strong and vociferous advocate of impartial, non-partisan redistricting. I applauded former New York Mayor Ed Koch's pre-election pledge drive some years ago, to which many of our legislators of both parties subscribed, vowing to adopt such non-partisan redistricting rules if elected. As you well know, those pledges were almost uniformly abandoned the minute the polls closed. Nonetheless, I continued my advocacy for impartial redistricting.

But that, as they say, was then, and this is now. Our nation faces an existential threat to our democratic traditions and practices. The Republican Party, still largely in thrall to Donald Trump, after largely voting to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election, has introduced legislation in many states—principally those with both Republican-controlled legislatures and Republican governors—to restrict voting by those who they feel will not support them, most notably the poor and communities of color.

We know very well that, when the 2020 census figures are finally released, those same Republican-controlled states will gerrymander their state and federal districts to ensure their continued control of their states and to increase, to the greatest extent possible, the number of Republicans in their congressional delegations. And the courts will be of no help, as the Supreme Court has declined to consider the question of partisan redistricting. With the current composition of the congress, the likelihood of passage of federal legislation preventing such practices is minimal, if it exists at all.

With this as background, acknowledging the dominance of Democrats in both houses of the New York legislature, and as much as it pains me, I have reluctantly come to the conclusion that pragmatism must take precedence over idealism, and if the democracy we have come to rely upon is to prevail, we must abandon the concept of an impartial redistricting commission at this time and redistrict New York's congressional districts to assure the election of as many Democrats as possible.

The majority's margin in the current House of Representatives is razor thin and, historically, the president's party loses seats in the mid-term election. Thus, it imperative that the New York delegation be comprised of the maximum number of Democrats.

If every state were required to adhere to impartial redistricting, I would be the first one to support that effort. But that is not where we are today. I greatly fear that, if we stand on principle and employ the Independent Redistricting Commission, we will find that, in 2022, anti-democratic forces will have captured control of the House of Representatives, and our democracy will be in great danger of perishing.

Perhaps by 2030 things will have improved to the point that such independent redistricting is widely accepted. But that is not the case today. And as much as it may offend our sensibilities and run counter to our desires, we must redistrict New York to ensure that democracy will prevail.

Thank you for your attention.

*Redistricting should be done by independent, volunteer, university mathematics/statistics departments.* Population should be the only criterion, maintaining as closely as possible, the same number of people. Districts should be drawn in rectangles except for geographical features that disturb straight lines, and respect municipal, county, state, etc. boundaries. Each vote in my square districts would carry the same weight as every other vote whether it belongs to a Republican, senior citizen, Latino, woman, or billionaire. There should never be anything that looks like Abraham Lincoln riding a vacuum cleaner. The legislature cannot be trusted to draw district lines.

Janet Goodsell  
Grand Island, NY



## The League of Women Voters of the Syracuse Metropolitan Area

With the Census every ten years also comes the redistricting issues of NY. That time is upon us now. There is a new weapon in the fight for redistricting and that is the four million in funding allocated for the Independent Redistricting Committee just recently. This is huge step in advocating for peoples' voices to be heard in the redistricting issues to which they live.

The Syracuse League of Women Voters is involved in this fight. To start with some basic data from the 2010 census which gives a clearer picture of the Syracuse area:

- **36.7 median age**
- **52% female**
- **74% white,13% black**
- **Income \$29,681 single, Household income \$53,886**
- **42%married, 2,4 people per household average**
- **17.8 % below poverty level**
- **30% Bachelor's degree or higher**

The 53<sup>rd</sup> district covers both urban, the urban city of Syracuse, outlying suburbs, and rural areas of Madison county. To serve these areas, different needs arise specific to the area. Our political leaders need to represent the needs of both urban, and rural, younger and older, gender, race, income levels, education level, etc. The more peoples' voices and communities of interests can be heard, the better they can be represented.

The 2020 census and redistricting will be especially significant as communities continue to deal with the many issues the pandemic has brought to light. Elected officials in national, state, and local government have been confronted with pressing problems, all demanding immediate attention: loss of income, child care, medical leave, internet access; to mention a few.

Redistricting is an important topic that citizens need to be aware of. Districts and lines need to represent the citizens living in them. Gerrymandering and redistricting are concepts that need to be heard and hopefully this people's hearing is a strong step forward in this process.

**The League of Women Voters of the Syracuse Metropolitan Area**

**LWW REDISTRICTING STATEMENT FOR LWNYS PEOPLE'S HEARING****APRIL 29, 2021**

The League of Women Voters of Westchester (LWVW) appreciates this opportunity to comment on the redistricting efforts that will soon take place for all U.S. Congressional Districts and NYS Senate and Assembly Districts. Note that several of Westchester County's districts include Rockland, Putnam, Dutchess, and Bronx Counties, and our sister leagues have contributed to this statement. We thank the League of Women Voters of New York State for being steadfast stewards in advocating for the development and funding of the Independent Redistricting Committee, and providing our members with additional information and insight.

While LWVW recognizes the legal constraints involved in shaping legislative districts, we oppose partisan gerrymandering, because it strips rights away from voters.

LWVW on all levels is laser focused on this decennial exercise following the Census with the goal to combat gerrymandered districts which benefit politicians and political parties rather than citizens. We are actively working on this process to help create *People Powered Fair Maps (PPFM)*. Our message to you is to get you to think about the priorities of communities of interest so that elected representatives truly represent their constituency and work for them.

A message for Legislators and the members of the Independent Redistricting Commission, your leadership will be key in consulting with communities of interest, hearing from the people, and drawing fair maps.

**Why are PPFM important to Westchester County?**

Westchester County is a diverse county that offers much variety with many communities of interest that cross municipalities.

Community groups/organizations have particular interests and want to have their elected representatives prioritize those interests. Those interests could center around (i) geography, e.g. Long Island Sound and the Hudson River, or cities in the southern part of the county and heavily wooded areas in the northern part of the county, (ii) institutions, e.g. schools, prisons,

medical facilities (iii) concerns, e.g., economic development, affordable housing, high tax rates, environmental issues, transportation concerns, food insecurity, flooding, electrical power grid issues, just to give a few examples.

We recommend being aggregated with others in a community who share interests.

Examples:

- Larchmont/Mamaroneck are Long Island Sound Shore communities and environmental issues relating to LI Sound are really important to them. The northern part of the Senate and Assembly districts and 95% of CD 17 don't share those concerns to the same extent.
- Ossining Town and Village in Westchester is a diverse community that faces economic challenges. Why would Senate District 38 be interested in that small community on the other side of the Hudson River?
- The city of White Plains is a city within Westchester County, yet is divided into two Senate Districts – 35 and 37. How can interests and challenges be addressed when divided?

Better maps would make fair communities. Currently, Congressional District 18 comprises four counties: Westchester, Putnam, Orange, and Dutchess. How can that mapping fairly meet the needs of those communities? Congressional District 17 is split down the middle by the Hudson River, yet includes Westchester and Rockland Counties. How can that fairly meet the needs of those diverse communities? And Congressional District 16 shares its map with Bronx County of New York City. How can that map fairly meet the needs of those diverse communities?

The League of Women Voters of Westchester asks that you all, Legislators and the IRC, focus upon the needs of community citizens by actively listening to them, and not hold a political lens upon mapping.

The people want their voices heard, and expect those whom they elect to represent them in legislatures to actively listen, accurately represent their voices, and take actions to meet their needs.

Kathy Meany

LWVW Redistricting Committee

April 29, 2021

My name is Eileen Lilly. I live at 158 W. Beech St., Long Beach, NY 11561

In 2011, as a new member of the LWV of Long Beach, I attended the Nassau County Legislature meeting on redistricting. I became involved in LWV – Long Beach after working in the Long Beach City School District as the District Clerk where I was responsible for school board and library board budget votes and elections. Redistricting would be another lesson for me in how democracy functions; it was an opportunity to learn, to support League of Women Voters and the City of Long Beach, my community, and Nassau County. The League of Women Voters is a nonprofit, nonpartisan political organization whose primary purpose is to promote the informed and active participation of citizens in their government. League-sponsored candidate events serve to educate the public, motivate voters to participate in the elections, and give voters a chance to hear the views of the candidates. The League never supports or opposes candidates or political parties.

As we League members sat in the crowded Nassau County Legislature's public hearing room, honesty, integrity, and respect for community were clearly not the underpinnings of this process. At one o'clock in the morning, disappointment was the underlying feeling in those community advocates in attendance, who spoke for their communities of interest. An iteration proposed by majority side of the Nassau County Legislature called for drawing a line around the City of Long Beach and attaching it to Merrick. Another example of the dysfunction drew a line around a legislator's home block and wrote him out of his own district. Both of those farcical ideas were eventually dropped at a subsequent meeting when public outcry could not be abated. But the cracking and packing of a minority community in southwest Nassau reflected the selfish, disingenuous, and arrogant abuse of power by elected representatives in the Legislature. I am referring to the Five Towns: Hewlett, Woodmere, Cedarhurst, Lawrence, and Inwood. Guidelines in drawing districts called for compact, contiguous communities of interest being kept together. Inwood is geographically connected to the Five Towns. Lawrence, Cedarhurst, and Inwood are a community of interest, sharing a school district, transportation bus and railroad routes. Inwood is also a diverse community. The Legislature cracked this community of shared interests of family, education, religious affiliations, and transportation and connected them with Valley Stream, North Valley Stream and Elmont. This is cracking and packing. Unfair!

I rejoice that the League of Women Voters stand for the rights of the people to be represented fairly, democratically. My hope is that the lines will be drawn fairly in 2021.



# The League of Women Voters

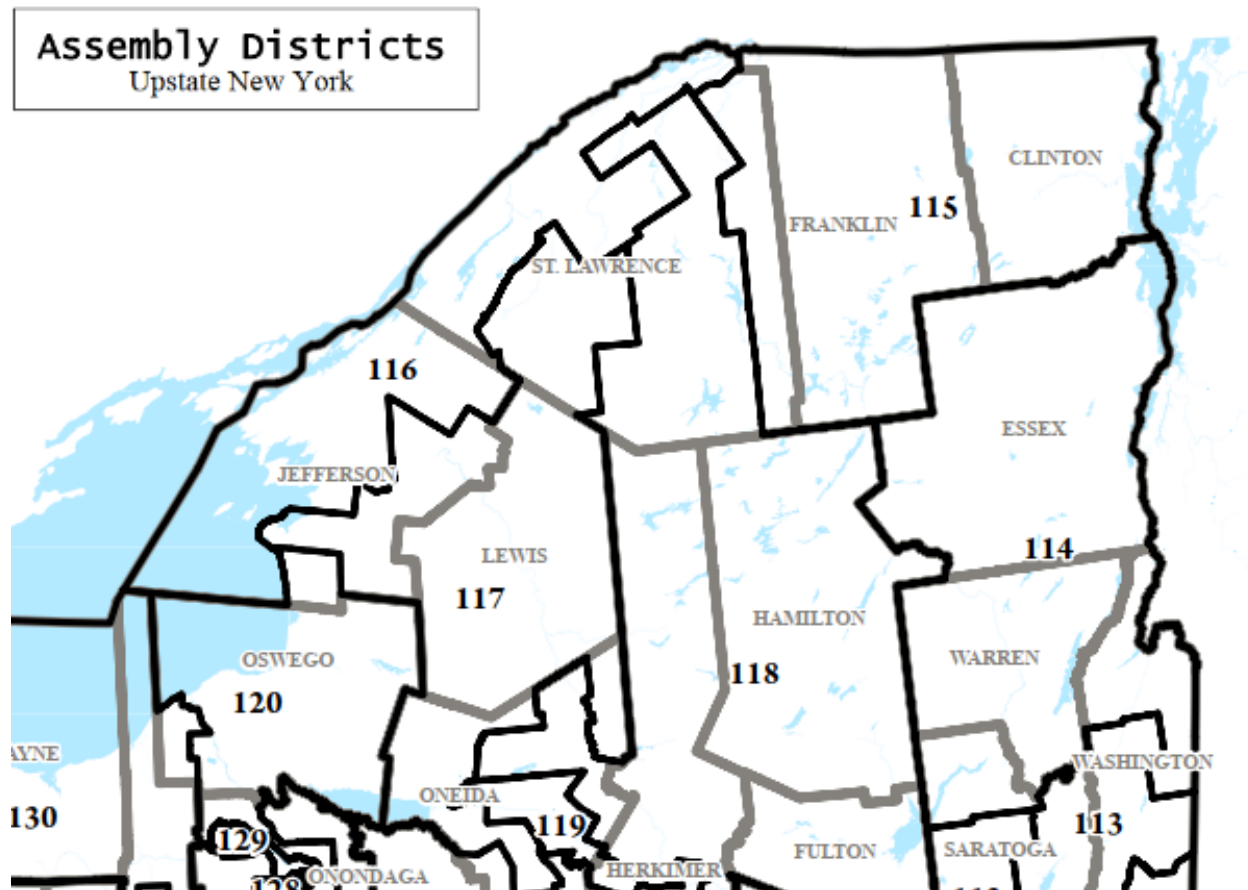
A Voice for Citizens, A Force for Change

## ST. LAWRENCE COUNTY

### St. Lawrence County Redistricting Testimony

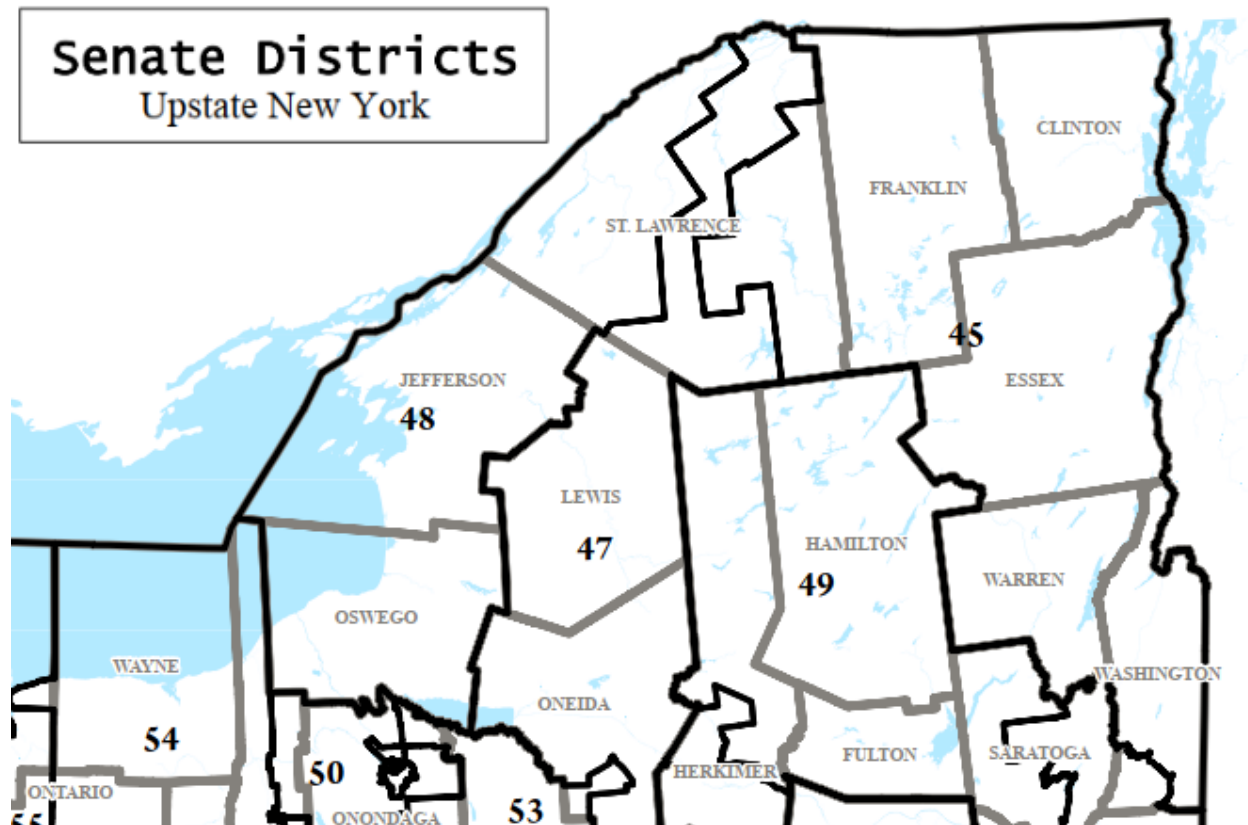
St. Lawrence County is New York's poster child for gerrymandering at the State level. With four Assembly and three state Senate seats, the county has been sliced and diced into small parcels without regard to the integrity of the community, its economic resources, or its partisan disposition. Voters with common interests – political, economic and social – have no way to express them in a politically coherent way through their elected representatives.

St. Lawrence County, population 107,740, is divided among four Assembly Districts: 115, 116, 117, and 118. *Not one of our currently elected Assembly members lives in our county.*



A look at the Upstate Assembly District map shows that with the exception of Jefferson County to our immediate east, the other counties in the North Country region are more or less intact within their respective Assembly Districts.

We are subdivided among three Senate districts: 45, 47 and 48. Only one of our state senators calls St. Lawrence County home. Again, no other North Country county is as subdivided as is ours.



The two largest non-agricultural employers in the county are education and healthcare.

With our 17 school districts parceled out among 7 electoral districts it is impossible to politically consolidate our interests regarding primary and secondary education. We have four major universities within a ten-mile radius, yet their division among three Assembly and two Senatorial districts effectively disenfranchises our higher education community.

Our major healthcare providers are similarly split between several state representatives. Thus, both of our major economic sectors are, in effect, politically voiceless.

The county is the center of gravity for none of these legislative districts because we are so electorally fractured. The only time we see most of our elected representatives is during election season: in fact, we rarely see them at all. They simply don't represent enough towns in SLC to bother. They don't need the votes from our county to retain their seats, so they ignore us.

All but one of our state representatives are Republicans. This does not accurately reflect the political demographics of the county, which is more evenly split between Republicans, Democrats, independents and other parties. If our political boundaries conformed to those of our county, candidates seeking to represent SLC would have to address the concerns of a broader swath of the electorate.

The problems St. Lawrence County faces are those common to other rural counties in New York: inadequate public transportation; a high poverty rate especially afflicting children and senior citizens; inadequate childcare and eldercare; food “deserts”, exacerbated by the lack of transportation; scarcity of accessible, and affordable, broadband; worse health outcomes and lower life expectancy than most more populous counties; not enough good paying jobs; high costs to the County for Medicaid and other services needed to supplement family incomes.

Nevertheless, we are compelled to contact seven different state representatives on any issue of county-wide concern for which state funding is allocated by county. To say the very least, this situation does not foster effective advocacy.

According to the most recent poll by the Jefferson Community College Center for Community Studies, [St. Lawrence County alone](#) of the Tri-County region (which included Jefferson and Lewis Counties) showed a marked drop in residents’ opinion of “the overall quality of life” in their community. Fifty-two percent of those polled said “the availability of good jobs is ‘poor’ and forty percent said the overall state of the local economy is ‘poor’” as well. Due to the pandemic, pollsters expected a drop in outlook for all three counties, but instead found it only in St. Lawrence. Clearly residents feel that their county is a distinctive entity!

We therefore petition the Redistricting Commission to give due consideration to the geographical integrity of our county when considering the revision of district boundaries. The current electoral map denies us the coherent political identity that St Lawrence County needs.

**Testimony: 1 Person/ 1 Vote Coalition of the Capital District  
LWVNY People's Hearing 4/29/21**

Good evening, my name is April Land and I represent the 1 Person/ 1 Vote Coalition of the Capital District as a member of the Capital Area Urban League.

Since 2018, the Coalition has been committed to the adoption of an equitable redistricting plan produced through a transparent, participatory, and fair process.

Let me first describe our community where we share common interest, such as damage to our environmental resources and the location of our state capitol.

In the Capital District, there are three distinct and geographically separated cities - Albany, Troy, and Schenectady. All share common issues, including poverty, inadequate housing, poor schools, and policing. There has been a failure to meet the needs of low-income residents in all areas, including in smaller municipalities located in our expansive peri-urban, suburban, and rural areas. Also, there is a lack of reliable and affordable broadband, especially in rural areas. High-speed internet connectivity is fundamental for economic activity and to bridge the digital divide.

What is unique about our community is that ours includes the state capitol, making it the center of state government. Our major employers are state government and educational and health care institutions. Much of that is exempt from real property taxes.

While many upstate areas have lost population, we have seen significant population changes in recent years. There has been an influx of immigrants and people relocating from New York City. Also, tech companies are increasing.

These demographic changes have exacerbated pre-existing unaddressed issues, like the lack of support for underfunded municipal governments, including unfunded mandates.

Significant systemic issues have impacted our community. Historically, corporate and political interests have obstructed the ability of our voters to have a meaningful voice and equal representation. Our diverse community needs to be able to define and address issues in its own way.

The new redistricting process gives us the opportunity to correct the mistakes of the past, where voices of people were not equally heard or weighted. Our highest and best hope for this process is that it challenges those who have been silent or silenced in the past to voice their concerns. Our political leadership needs to reflect the community so participation and decision making comes from the electorate.

Our group's purpose is to:

- Educate the public on the importance of redistricting and encourage engagement.
- Provide training.



- Partner with Representable to initiate Community Mapping Drives for historically underserved communities to have the information and tools that they need to participate fully and meaningfully in redistricting.
- Identify issues that impact communities of color, the environment, and social justice.
- And advocate for transparency and equity throughout the redistricting process.

We expect to review the maps, submit our own, and hold the Commission accountable for fair mapping. An urban league member coined the term “kitchen table maps” that the 1 Person/1Vote Coalition has adopted. We believe that our voters should be at the table drawing our own maps, determining fair and equitable districts that ensure one person, one vote.

Thank you.

Connie Sterling-Engman, League of Women Voters of Tompkins County

Good evening. My name is Connie Sterling-Engman and I am speaking on behalf of the League of Women Voters of Tompkins County. As a non-partisan organization it is extremely important that the League ensures that New York State, and our county government, identifies and listens to all communities of interest and not just the political parties as our state undertakes redistricting.

Tompkins County is very diverse and includes urban, suburban and rural communities, with a geographic heart at the southern end of Cayuga Lake. The County's communities of interest include agriculture, health, agricultural and cultural tourism, sustainability and the environment, focused around Cayuga Lake, which unifies rather than divides the County. Our higher education institutions reach out to and link all these communities socially and economically. And through Cornell University, we even have a strong connection to New York City. Thus we have little in common with Jamestown and the western Southern Tier, which are in our current district, and far more with Cortland County, which is not.

At the state Senate level, communities of interest should be able to come together to speak with one voice, but Tompkins County is currently divided between three separate districts.

At the local level, a community of interest in Tompkins County can be as small as an elementary school community, a group of non-English speaking refugees, and the homeless population, or as large as the academics who live near the colleges and the farmers who live outside of the city. Every community should have a voice that can be heard. All deserve representation, or an effective voice when that community is kept together as a whole and not divided amongst wards, or seats or districts.

Before the redistricting that followed the 2010 census, Tompkins County's congressional district was described as Abraham Lincoln on a broomstick. This was symbolic of the ways in which our state has been gerrymandered when districts are formed. As we learn of the loss of a congressional seat in NY State as a result of the Census, it is more important than ever that we ensure no gerrymandering takes place as district lines are redrawn.

The way the districts are drawn will impact voters for the next ten years. They should be drawn with the best interest of voters in mind not, as in the past when districts were drawn to deliberately thwart the effort to effect change because it benefited, politically, those drawing them to do so. The process of drawing district maps at all levels of government should be open and transparent and include avenues such as this meeting for meaningful public input.

It is the League of Tompkins County's hope that the new, independent commission will redistrict so as to allow everyone to have a voice at every level of government. And, that when elections are over, those in power will represent all the people in their district and give voice to minority opinions when possible. That is what the League is all about, helping people vote,

helping them know the issues, and helping them have as clear as possible a picture of the candidates they can choose from, assessing which candidates will actually represent everyone.

Sue Ruff, Southern Tier Independence Center

Thank you, League of Women Voters, for this opportunity tonight.

Why Does Re-Districting Matter to People with Disabilities? Let's start by looking at challenges and barriers to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness if you have a disability.

Southern Tier Independence Center, established in 1983, is based in Binghamton but we provide programs and services for people with all types of disabilities of all ages across South-Central New York State. At this time our greatest needs revolve around keeping people with disabilities in their own homes and out of nursing facilities and other segregated, congregate settings. More than 15,000 people in the state have died of COVID in these settings. Finding affordable and accessible housing is extremely difficult and in some communities, impossible. Finding home care workers is even harder due to state policies and the lack of fair pay for home care workers. In July the minimum wage for fast food workers will go up to \$15 an hour while the pay for home care workers North of Westchester, will be staying at \$12.50/hour. This means that the very real and serious shortage of personal care workers will become even greater. Without home care workers, people end up institutionalized.

There is another group of people who are also struggling. They are the individuals with disabilities who end up in county jails, some because their support needs are not met in the community. For perspective, last month there were 10,141 un-sentenced people residing in NYS Jails, most of whom are eligible to vote. Last November when most of us went to the polls that number was 9,561. We have heard from District Attorneys, Public Defenders, and even the justification memo on NYS bill S2209/A540 - that more than 80% of the people who are incarcerated have disabilities. Un-sentenced but in jail means they are not adjudicated and not out on bail. And most have likely lost jobs, apartments, and sometimes their children. Although legally able to vote, there are almost no provisions to register and vote by absentee ballot in almost all the state's jails. Would these potential voters affect local, state or federal elections? Yes.

We have worked very hard to assist people with their voting rights, making polling locations accessible, finding employment opportunities as 70% of people with disabilities who want to work - can't find jobs, health care needs, housing searches, educational rights, transportation, and community access. However, our biggest challenge, more than thirty years after the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, remains the ongoing battle for people to live in their own homes in their own communities with the supports and services they need. This is a civil rights battle. While some elected officials have heard our voices, many continue to ignore the nearly **20%** of New York citizens with disabilities. We are your family members, your neighbors, your students, your employees, your fellow citizens.

But for very many of us the future does not hold the promise of freedom or self-determination. It holds the threat of institutionalization whether we live in urban or rural areas. We care about the fair and objective drawing of district lines because we understand how hard we will have to continue to educate the people who will be elected to serve us all, the people who decide every year what is included in local, state, and national budgets and legislation - and what is left behind on the cutting room floor.

Thank you, again, for this opportunity.



**LatinoJustice PRLDEF**  
**League of Women Voter's Virtual People's Hearing 2021 Statement**

Testimony of Fulvia Vargas-De Leon  
Associate Counsel, LatinoJustice PRLDEF

April 29, 2021

LatinoJustice PRLDEF would like to express its profound appreciation to the NY League of Women Voters for organizing this event and inviting LJP to testify. LJ's redistricting work spans over four decades of ensuring districts are drawn in a manner which fairly and accurately reflect community population demographics. Redistricting is a complex process, but it is an essential component to our democracy, to enabling our communities in having a voice in voting for candidates of their choosing to represent them. If redistricting is done fairly and transparently, we are then more likely to have a government that is truly representative of the people it serves. If redistricting is intertwined in partisan political shenanigans to facilitate incumbent gerrymandering, we're then more likely end up with districts that provides our community with less electoral power than others.

LatinoJustice PRLDEF, originally established as the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund (PRLDEF) in 1972, is one of the country's leading nonprofit civil rights public interest law organizations. We work to advance, promote, and protect the legal rights of Latinos throughout the nation. Our work is focused on addressing systemic discrimination and ensuring equal access to justice in the advancement of voting rights, housing rights, educational equity, immigrant rights, language access rights, employment rights, workplace justice, and seeking to address all forms of discriminatory bias that adversely impact Latinos. As part of our ongoing work to protect the rights of Latino voters, we have advocated and litigated against practices that seek to dilute the vote of minority communities such as voter roll purges, failure to provide language assistance at poll sites, and redistricting practices that seek to dilute the voting power of communities of color.

The redistricting fight is well underway as this week we learned that New York will lose one congressional seat. We know that this will begin a discussion about where the loss should occur – do we push the loss on the Congressional representatives of the greater New York City metropolitan area including Long island, or those of upstate or western New York where there has been diminishing overall population numbers? Do we consider whether it would be fair for the loss of a district to occur upstate, where there is greater population loss, in order to prevent the disenfranchisement of downstate district voters? Redistricting is complicated, but it does not excuse practices that tactically cancel out the collective voting strength of certain communities.

During the last redistricting cycle after the 2010 census, LatinoJustice fought tirelessly to ensure that New York's Congressional and Senate districts were a true reflection of our communities. This meant going into federal court to initially address LATFOR's failure to timely draw congressional redistricting plans in time for the 2012 primaries, and a subsequent equal protection challenge to NYS's Senate plans which created overpopulated districts downstate and



under populated districts upstate and the creation of a 63<sup>rd</sup> senate seat in the Capital District area as a means to try and preserve a partisan political stronghold in our State's government.

When elected officials and legislative bodies are given exclusive, unfettered power to manipulate district lines, voters lose. While we are entering a new redistricting cycle with the newly created NYS Independent Redistricting Commission in place for the first time, we are well aware of the partisan manipulation to draw maps which favor parties over the people. This is also the first redistricting cycle without the pre-clearance protections contained in Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act's "checks and balances" on any electoral changes in covered jurisdictions like Bronx, Kings & New York Counties.

In New York, Latinos represent nearly 20 percent of the State's population. With redistricting efforts occurring every 10 years, it is imperative that any reapportionment process include the voices and demographics of Latino communities. LatinoJustice PRLDEF wants to ensure that this redistricting process is equitable in the way districts are drawn and that transparent decisions are made reflecting communities of color. An equitable redistricting process matters because it sets the stage for political opportunity for a new set of Latino leaders at all levels of government.

LatinoJustice PRLDEF stands by a redistricting process that is (1) open in the public's ability to actively engage at every step of the process; (2) draws maps in a manner which accurately reflects changes in the population; and (3) focuses on safeguarding racial minority groups from maps which have the effect of diminishing their ability to elect candidates of their choice. We must take affirmative steps to ensure that this redistricting cycle does not run counter to the protections offered by the Constitution and the Voting Rights act as well as the essence of democracy guaranteed by the principle of one person, one vote.

Fulvia Vargas-De Leon  
Associate Counsel  
fvargasdeleon@latinojustice.org | 212.739.7580

**Testimony on Behalf of Hispanic Federation**  
**Importance of Redistricting to the Hispanic Communities in New York**  
**Presented by Emely Paez, Dir. of Gov. Affairs & Civic Engagement**

Good Evening. My name is Emely Paez, and I am the Director of Government Affairs and Civic Engagement with Hispanic Federation. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today at the People's Hearing on Redistricting.

Since its inception, Hispanic Federation's (HF) mission has been to empower and advance the Hispanic community, and several decades later HF continues to be a leading force in the battle to have a fair and accountable government. As one of the nation's top Latino nonprofit organizations, HF works with its network of Hispanic nonprofits, grassroots leaders, and media partners to empower and advance Latinos across the United States. Through our programmatic efforts, Hispanic Federation serves our community in the areas of Civic Engagement, Health, Education, Economic Empowerment, and Immigration.

Following each decennial census, HF has been on the frontlines advocating for Latino voices to be heard and included in the reapportionment and redistricting process. This includes educational advocacy around Census participation. In 2020 alone, HF reached out to millions of New Yorkers using culturally competent outreach measures in the height of a global health pandemic. HF worked with vulnerable Latino immigrant communities to be counted in spite of the fear instilled by misinformation. Reassuring them that Census participation would not be used against them and that the data collected is protected by federal law. Adding to the importance of federal resources and representation needed in our community.

New York state lost a congressional seat, and many have lost representation at the federal level, because 89 people were not counted. Despite this being the best of the worst-case scenarios—this is the result of poor investments and resources provided to the communities that need them the most throughout the state. In the last twenty years the state of New York has lost 5 seats in Congress, and whether those seats come from upstate or the city, the effect is the same, dilution of power, and less representation, especially for communities of color. We can do better.





New York State has seen a dramatic growth in the Latino population over the last few decades – with 3.7 million or 19% of the population identifying as Hispanic. It’s not an exaggeration to say that redistricting will affect millions of Latinos in the state and yet it is not a topic that is top of mind in our communities.

Communicating directly with grassroots leaders is critically important as trusted messengers of our communities. New York State should be compelled to advance a process for drawing district boundaries that puts our communities first by investing the requisite resources, capacity, and time necessary for drawing district boundaries that puts our communities first. We must ensure our communities are included at every level of this decision-making process that the systems and processes by which we choose to draw lines are transparent, fair, and representative and that there is reciprocity in shared information in a culturally competent manner.

That starts with closely monitoring the development and efforts of the newly established Independent Redistricting (IRC) Commission. Alongside other Latino organizations, HF decried the lack of Latino representation in the commission. While we applaud the addition of Ms. Ivelisse Cuevas-Molina on the commission; we also acknowledge that her representation is in part the outcome of the advocacy efforts of dozens of organizations banding together to demand inclusion and a more representative commission. We must also ensure that funds allocated to the IRC are sufficient and distributed in a timely manner. This is critical for the functioning of a truly independent commission that is intended to break through historical inequities that sustain inequitable practices like gerrymandering. We must hold them to that commitment.

We look forward to collectively working together towards achieving a fair and equitable redistricting process that is reflective of the dramatic growth of communities of color in New York—allowing all communities the opportunity to have fair representation and to have candidates that reflect their ideas, and that help meet the needs of their community.

Thank you.