August 27, 2021 Submitted via Email

Dear Commissioners,

We write to urge you to prioritize transparency and accountability in the state’s first-ever Commission-led redistricting process by posting to your website the publicly submitted written testimonies and audio transcripts of the first round of redistricting hearings. We further urge you to schedule open meetings of your mapping deliberations as you begin negotiating maps for New York State Senate, Assembly, and Congressional districts.

While our joint organizations commend your prompt reapportionment efforts and applaud the excellent information gathering meetings held in July and August, we believe that the public must have access to the comments and testimonies submitted by New Yorkers statewide. New York State is home to many residents who do not speak English as their primary language. We believe that transcripts of prior meetings and hearings should also be available in languages other than English and in formats that can be read using screen reader software.

In addition to the sharing of meeting transcripts and written testimonies, our organizations urge the Commission to hold public meetings of your map-making negotiations before the release of draft maps in mid-September. By broadcasting mapping deliberations, the public will have a greater understanding of the process for drawing new district lines and more self-assurance in the reapportionment methods used to redraw our legislative districts.

Holding open meetings on mapping deliberations is not an uncommon practice for Commission-led redistricting efforts. Notably, the New York City Districting Commission held multiple public mapping meetings in 2012. These meetings could easily be webcast so that all New Yorkers would have the opportunity to watch and feel confidence in this new redistricting process.
We again applaud the efforts of the Commission and its staff for operating within a limited timeframe in constrained conditions caused by the ongoing pandemic. We hope that the public will have a further opportunity to participate in redistricting in the months to come.

Sincerely,

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Laura Ladd Bierman  
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