Dear Commissioners,

We write to urge you to prioritize transparency and accountability in the redistricting process going forward and request that you release draft maps in a format that is more accessible to the average New Yorker.

Our organizations are extremely disappointed that thus far all your mapping negotiations have taken place in secret. While we understand you had limited time to draft initial maps, the multiple maps put forward make it obvious that the Commission would have benefited from having an open and transparent dialogue about testimonies that were presented and submitted at your listening session. An open meeting to discuss priorities in draft maps and consider communities of interest throughout the state could have eliminated the need to present multiple maps.

Furthermore, the maps that you have released are completely inaccessible to the average New Yorker. Although your files include images of the maps, it is impossible to see what streets, towns, villages, and cities are being divided and combined in these images. The information released also fails to include usable demographic and population data in an open format such as .CSV or .XML. Some data is included in the map PDFs but this is far less functional than a spreadsheet format.

Community leaders have worked to put these maps into a Google Map format. This style of map is far more useful to New Yorkers and will allow them to see their communities and where they reside in each version of the maps. We urge you to follow the example of these community leaders and create Google-formatted redistricting maps and post them to your website immediately. Certainly the two mapping consulting firms you hired without RFP have the capability to perform this task.

The public is already distrustful of agencies seeking to reapportion their neighborhoods. Veiling your negotiations and putting out two sets of maps in an unusable format is only exacerbating that distrust. New Yorkers took the time to present you with thoughtful comments on their communities of interest and the issues they face because of how their districts have been drawn in past redistricting cycles. We implore you to seriously consider these comments and prioritize transparency in the remainder of the state redistricting process.

Sincerely,

Laura Ladd Bierman
Executive Director
League of Women Voters of New York State

Jose Perez
Deputy General Counsel
LatinoJustice PRLDEF

Asher Ross
Senior Strategist
New York Immigration Coalition Action

John Kaehny
Executive Director
Reinvent Albany

Betsy Gotbaum
Executive Director
Citizens Union of the City of New York

Blair Horner
Executive Director
New York Public Interest Research Group

Betsy Gotbaum
Executive Director
Common Cause NY

Susan Lerner
Executive Director
Common Cause NY