



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Liz Krueger

State Senator Liz Krueger Calls for Non-Partisan Commission to Oversee Redistricting Says Passage this Year is Key to Ensuring 2012 District Lines Are Drawn Fairly

LIZ KRUEGER April 29, 2008

On "Reform Day" State Senator Liz Krueger (D-Manhattan) called for redistricting reform through passage of S.487, a bill she co-sponsors along with State Senator John Bonacic (R-Mount Hope).

"When I first ran for office in 2002, I vowed to work to solve the 'Albany Syndrome,'" said Senator Krueger. "We have made progress in the past six years but much more needs to be done. One of the major obstacles still preventing real change in Albany is the partisan process of gerrymandering legislative districts."

In New York State redistricting normally occurs once every 10 years after the federal census is taken. The rules on how these districts are to be drawn are contained in Article 3, Sections 4 and 5, of the New York Constitution. Under current Constitutional law the State Senate and Assembly can draw their own districts, with the only real restriction being that each district should hold approximately the same number of people. The result of this process is the creation of oddly shaped and sometimes non-contiguous districts based on party enrollment.

"Drawing districts based on party preference has been the standard of Albany politics for far too long," Senator Krueger stated. "This process undermines the very foundation of the democracy we are elected to uphold. We can no longer allow partisanship to exploit a system that only serves to disenfranchise voters, protect incumbents, and consolidate their own power." In fact, NY State law and legal precedent have established that district lines CAN be drawn in order to ensure that party representation and incumbency are protected.

S487 calls for an amending of Article 3, Sections 4 and 5 of the New York Constitution, as well as adding a Section 5-b. The proposed amendments would create a five member non-partisan redistricting committee, with the leader of each caucus in both the Assembly and Senate choosing one representative, and a fifth member agreed upon by all four leaders. The commission would set the standards for how districts should be drawn, including keeping the district as physically compact as possible. The commission would oversee the drawing of lines for districts represented by members of congress, state senators, and members of the assembly.

To amend the State Constitution a bill must be passed by two consecutive legislatures and then be approved by a vote of all the citizens of New York. Since the next redistricting will occur in 2012, S487 must be passed both in 2008 and again during the 2009-2010 legislative session. This is the only way there will be enough time to have a statewide vote before the 2012 redistricting occurs.

"These problems are not only real, but urgent," stressed Senator Krueger. "If S487 is not passed this session, there will be no chance of having the law in place for the 2012 redistricting. Earlier this week I stood with advocates throughout our State calling for public financing of State Campaigns and I argued that the evidence was in; only 50% of those eligible to vote are doing so and public opinion polls show that most citizen's view their elected officials with disdain. For real democracy we need clean elections and fair

redistricting. New Yorkers have waited long enough for reform in Albany. This can not wait another 10 years!"