

# News from Senator George M. Borrello

## 57th Senate District

*Representing Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, and portions of Livingston County*

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### **STATEMENT BY SENATOR BORRELLO ON THE INDEPENDENT REDISTRICTING COMMISSION'S REPORT AND DRAFT MAPS**

“After decades of redistricting being dominated by partisan battles and gerrymandering, this year promised to be different. A 2014 referendum passed by voters gave the once-a-decade responsibility for drawing legislative and congressional district maps to a new “Independent Redistricting Commission (IRC),” with the goal of ensuring no region, special interest or political party gained an unfair advantage over another.

The IRC’s admission today that they were unable to reach agreement on a proposed map, and the release of two very different maps, one drawn by Democrats and the other by Republicans, is concerning. It suggests that the majority party’s true motivation is to drive this process back to the Legislature, where they can return to the behind-closed-doors gerrymandering process. The ruling party has little incentive to compromise through the framework of the IRC.

The people of New York State spoke out and said that they wanted an inclusive, transparent and bipartisan process. With the next round of hearings occurring in the weeks ahead, I encourage New Yorkers to participate and provide their input on these two proposed maps. Citizen involvement is the best defense against political insiders hijacking the process and acting in their own best interests, rather than in support of those they represent.

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, which will send a strong message to

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has is to two vastly different proposed maps had some red flags that the ‘independence’ New Yorkers voted for is being undermined by politics. The warning signs came months ago when Democrats in the Legislature voted on a constitutional amendment that will go before voters in November that will would make it easier for them to hijack the process and eliminate the minority party from having any influence on the final maps.

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#### STATEMENT BY SENATOR BORRELLO ON THE INDEPENDENT REDISTRICTING COMMISSION'S REPORT AND DRAFT MAPS

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“Today’s report by the IRC had some red flags that the ‘independence’ New Yorkers voted for is being undermined by politics.

“We know the Democrat majority in the state Senate and Assembly plan to ignore the commission’s recommendations and fight for district boundaries to eliminate Republican-held seats in Congress. With majorities in the state Legislature and a Democrat in the Governor’s mansion, this is their opportunity gerrymander their way to a Democrat majority in the U.S. House of Representatives.

“The warning signs came months ago when Democrats in the Legislature voted on a constitutional amendment that will go before voters in November that will would make it easier for them to hijack the process and eliminate the minority party from having any influence on the final maps.

“That would be a slap in the face to New Yorkers who voted in 2014 to prevent gerrymandering of districts which led to the creation of the Independent Redistricting Commission.

“I’m calling on Gov. Hochul and the Legislature to let the commission do its work and let the redistricting process move forward as planned without political pressure and in accordance with the wishes of the people.”

Over 700 citizens submitted written or oral input including many from the 57<sup>th</sup> Senate District.

here were about 430 written submissions, and almost 300 people spoke at the hearings.

**The goal: Make sure Americans get equal representation from elected officials. In practice, the process known as redistricting is highly political, with parties battling for advantage by drawing lines that favor their candidates.**

While he says those hearings “weren’t statutorily required,” Jennifer Wilson with the League of Women Voters says she’s disappointed by what she calls a lack of transparency. She says “there’s been no public engagement on the actual mapping negotiations.” “Any negotiations on the maps that have been done so far have been done behind closed doors. And in addition to that the testimonies and the transcripts of the oral testimonies that were submitted by the public have yet to be released,” Wilson said.

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Citizens were encouraged to provide their input

This year, New Yorkers were given the historic opportunity to have a voice in the redistricting process.

An historic reform is changing the way New York State draws its legislative and congressional district maps—a once-a-decade process that helps decide who will represent you in the halls of state and federal government for the next 10 years.

A new, voter-approved Independent Redistricting Commission will rely on input from citizens—not politicians—to decide how best to divide the state into the required number of Senate, Assembly and Congressional districts, while ensuring that individual neighborhoods and communities are fairly represented.

This new process will ensure that no region, special interest or political party gain an unfair advantage or too much power at the expense of the others. But it only works if citizens like you join with neighbors, friends and communities to get involved and make your voices heard.

State Senator XXXX is urging constituents to become involved and make their voices heard in the redrawing of legislative and congressional districts to help ensure fair representation in state and federal government for our region and across New York.

Once a decade, the state is required to draw new district lines that reflect population and demographic changes reported in the most recent Census. Unlike in past years when politicians drew those lines, more than 2 million New Yorkers voted in a 2014 referendum to give that responsibility to a new “Independent Redistricting Commission.” The Commission plans public hearings this summer and fall to collect input from citizens to devise the best possible plan.

“Creation of an Independent Redistricting Commission took power away from politicians and put it in the hands of citizens to help ensure that no region of the state, special interest or political party gains an unfair advantage, and helps create balanced government and representation for the next 10 years,” said Senator XXXXX.

“This historic reform, overwhelmingly approved by voter referendum, creates a redistricting process that is more open and transparent, but it only works if citizens themselves stand up and make their voices heard as the commission begins redrawing district lines.”

Can districts be drawn however state officials want?

Not exactly. The 2014 changes to the state Constitution approved by voters say districts have to be compact and contiguous — no floating fragments — and have to have roughly the same number of residents. The lines can’t be drawn to “discourage competition” or to favor incumbents or political parties, and they cannot limit the participation of a racial group.

Drawing a district to give an individual, group or party an advantage is known as gerrymandering.

Many existing district boundaries zig-zag block by block, resulting in odd, puzzle-like shapes. Local examples include State Sen. Zellnor Myrie’s Brooklyn district and the adjacent district drawn in 2012 by Republicans who controlled the Senate to concentrate Orthodox Jewish voters — and subsequently won by Sen. Simcha Felder, a Democrat who supported continued GOP control.