



Testimony of Reinvent Albany

NYS Joint Legislative Hearing on Redistricting

***Re: Senate and Assembly Must Help Commission Function,
Not Overhaul Redistricting Process***

July 15, 2020

Good morning, my name is Tom Speaker, and I am a Policy Analyst for Reinvent Albany. Reinvent Albany advocates for open and accountable government in New York State. We thank the Senate and Assembly for holding this hearing today on redistricting, the first hearing on this topic for the 2022 cycle.

We call on the legislature to focus their efforts on helping the redistricting commission function properly, rather than on making major structural changes to the redistricting process. While we recognize that the redistricting process needs improvement, the earliest constitutional changes would take effect after voter approval in November 2021, which would be too far along in the process of drawing district lines.

The first passage of a constitutional amendment would need to be done by the Legislature in the next couple weeks, while the public discussion around redistricting has only started in earnest with this hearing today. Major changes to redistricting policy should only be made after the public has had sufficient time to weigh in. The constitutional amendment passed in 2014 is not perfect, but it was approved by the voters and is the only feasible framework for drawing lines for 2022, given current time limitations.

That said, we believe that statutory changes could and should be made to the redistricting commission's time frames to address the consolidated June primary date and delays in census collection data related to COVID-19. These ministerial changes can be made via statute and would provide the commission guidance on how to proceed during this cycle while ensuring adequate time for public hearings and review.

We also support the League of Women Voters of New York State's request to ensure that the commission is fully equipped both with funding and staff. There should also be greater clarity around the application of the Open Meetings Law and Freedom of Information Law to the commission. Lastly, the commission must work to appoint its final two non-affiliated commissioners so that planning can finally begin. It is important for public trust that the commission begin its work soon and lay out an open roadmap for how this redistricting cycle will unfold.

While discussion of changes is warranted, we believe that these issues should be considered when there is more time for thoughtful public discussion and review. Changing redistricting midstream would be disruptive and potentially damage public confidence in the process. Consideration of larger structural changes should only be made with more time for public input.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.