



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James Tedisco

Staying Within the Lines of New York's Upcoming Redistricting

SENATOR JIM TEDISCO July 26, 2021



We urge children to stay within the lines when they learn how to draw, shouldn't we hold New York State government to the same standard when it comes to drawing reality-based legislative districts that will impact nearly every facet of our daily lives?

If you're into modern art or enjoy taking Rorschach tests, you might be interested in looking at a map of our state's legislative districts where you will see Senate, Assembly and Congressional districts that resemble salamanders, snakes, Abraham Lincoln, a witch on a broom and a whole host of other odd configurations that will leave you scratching your head.

Free, fair, open and competitive elections are at the heart of the democratic process. In spite of this fact, for too long election maps in this state have been drawn-up behind closed doors motivated entirely by

political concerns that have little if anything to do with effective representation for the people of New York State.

No doubt, you may remember first learning about redistricting back in high school civics class. Redistricting is the process of using U.S. Census data once a decade to redraw legislative boundary lines of electoral districts that are supposed to reflect demographic and population changes.

Why does this matter? Redistricting impacts our communities in every possible way imaginable including how our taxpayer funds are collected and allocated: from education, healthcare to property taxes, economic development and job creation and public safety. It sets the stage for the kind of representation you will have in our state and nation's capitols and the volume of its voice on our behalf.

History has shown that too often, legislative districts are gerrymandered -- or carved up -- to benefit the party in power to the detriment of minority party voices and the common concerns of voters. Rather than drawing districts based on commonalities, legislative leaders engage in packing and stacking voters to protect partisan agendas.

How's that been working out for our state? New York is number one for outmigration of residents with 126,000 people leaving last year and over one million in the past decade (even if you take into consideration new births, those who passed away and new immigration). The state is ranked last for a litany of negative economic indicators including highest taxes and worst business climate in the nation.

The good news is 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."

This historic reform, which I long supported and sponsored legislation for, will change 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.

The 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.

The Commission is planning a series of hearings and any group, community or individual may submit testimony, either in person, or through its website, www.nyirc.gov. A virtual forum for the Capital Region is scheduled for August 2nd.

Please consider submitting testimony related to how redistricting will affect you, your family and your community. This feedback is critical and is your chance to help steer the future of New York and speak out for the concerns of our communities.

Your voice is especially important as a backstop to the efforts of the downstate-driven party bosses who have quietly slipped onto this November's ballot under the cover of darkness a new constitutional amendment that would roll back the redistricting reform that millions of voters strongly supported. If this passes, it would continue to take New York State in the wrong direction that has led to the exodus from our state and its negative economic fortunes and negatively impact our area's balanced representation in Albany and Washington.

Redistricting shouldn't be about what's best for Democrats or Republicans but what is best for all New Yorkers.

If we're ever going to prevent the Empire State from becoming the "Empty State" and truly change the way New York State's government works, we've got to start by reforming the way legislative district lines are drawn and the process that's beginning now is a path forward.