

REDISTRICTING REFORM:

Support The Creation Of An Independent Redistricting Commission

Background:

At the heart of the public's discontent over the state of New York's democracy is the understanding that state lawmakers rig the system for their own political gain. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the way legislative district lines are drawn.

Currently, the State Senate Republicans and the State Assembly Democrats are allowed to draw the lines for their respective house – ensuring their re-election in the process. This has created a body of legislators that is not responsive to their constituents' concerns. The only check on this system is the Governor's veto powers.

We believe that meaningful redistricting reform, including the creation of an independent redistricting commission, must be a top priority for those legislators interested in reform. Lawmakers should support legislation ensuring that the drawing of legislative district lines is not done by those who stand to directly benefit from how they are drawn. We urge the Governor and all gubernatorial candidates to do the same.

Action:

- Lawmakers should create an independent redistricting commission to draw district lines in accordance with strict and fair guidelines.
- Candidates for Governor should vow to veto any lines that are drawn by the legislature and follow through accordingly.

Partisan Redistricting has Undermined New York's Representative Democracy:

- **Redistricting Decisions Play a Critical Role in Having Maintained Albany's Legislative Status Quo for Decades.** In the last 20 years, America has changed. Twenty years ago, the Internet and i-pods were nowhere to be found. Yet, when it comes to majority party dominance, not much has changed. Since the Democrats took control of the Assembly in the 1970s – and redrew the maps in 1980 – the majority parties in each house have maintained their dominance, and critical issues have consistently failed to be addressed.
- **Redistricting Decisions Play a Significant Role in New York State's Lack of Competitive Elections.** New York State elections are incredibly one-sided. Incumbent state legislative candidates are re-elected at a staggering rate. How district lines are drawn contributes to this phenomenon. The difference in enrollments between the two major parties is close enough in only 25 of the 212 legislative districts (11 percent) to permit competitive elections on a frequent basis. And in over 2500 general election races in the past 24 years, a challenger has beaten an incumbent only 34 times.
- **Divided Legislative Control Shows That Partisan Redistricting Has Distorted Legislative Representation.** If district lines were drawn to benefit constituents or communities of interest, one would expect that Senate and Assembly districts would share many common boundaries; instead, the lines for each body look radically different. Democrats have maintained a stronghold in the Assembly and Republicans have an impregnable hold on the Senate — revealing that legislators drew the district lines to benefit the parties, not the communities they represent.
- **Redistricting decisions undermine the concept of "one person, one vote."** Only 29 of 212 legislative districts (14 percent) are within one percent of the "ideal size." While not illegal, New York has legislative district lines that can be dramatically different in size. A recent analysis of district populations created in 2002 found that State Assembly districts ranged in size from 121,111 people to 133,038 people, and State Senate districts ranged in size from 290,925 people to 320,851 people.

What's next:

We are calling for the creation of an independent redistricting commission to draft the state legislative and congressional political boundaries for the 2012 elections and beyond. There are alternatives to the current dysfunction and status quo. Some states, such as Iowa and Arizona have independent and non-partisan redistricting

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systems that ensure a more representative and responsive state government. New York should adopt a system where independent commissioners are appointed from a pool of diverse and qualified candidates. Redistricting plans should ensure racial and language minorities fair and effective representation, and have neither the purpose nor the effect of diluting racial minority voting strength.¹ Commissioners should not be allowed to draw district lines that either favor or oppose any political party or incumbent legislator. Assembly bill 6287 would provide a major step forward towards achieving those goals. Under A.6287, an independent commission would draw proposed district lines and then send them to state lawmakers for approval or disapproval, with little power to amend the proposal. Should there be no agreement, the courts would be empowered to step in. This will ensure greater integrity in the process and greater responsiveness to our legislators.

Our groups urge the Governor, the Senate and Assembly to develop and debate meaningful redistricting reform, such as Assembly Bill 6287, and pass a bill that removes the legislative districting process from partisan hands.
