



# Onondaga County Legislature

**JAMIE McNAMARA**  
Clerk

**DAVID H. KNAPP**  
Chairman

**MELANIE VILARDI**  
Deputy Clerk

401 Montgomery Street • Court House • Room 407 • Syracuse, New York, 13202  
Phone: 315.435.2070 • Fax: 315.435.8434 • [www.ongov.net/legislature](http://www.ongov.net/legislature)

## **PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES DECEMBER 21, 2021 - 11:30 A.M.**

### **PROPOSED LOCAL LAW(S) REGARDING THE REAPPORTIOMENT OF THE ONONDAGA COUNTY LEGISLATURE**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Mr. May, Mr. Rowley, Mr. Burtis, Mrs. Tassone, Ms. Cody, Ms. Abbott, Ms. Kuhn, Mr. Ryan, Dr. Chase, Mr. Holmquist, Mr. McBride, Mr. Bush, Dr. Kelly, Mr. Kinne, Mr. Williams, Mrs. Ervin, Chairman Knapp

Chairman Knapp called the 11:30 a.m. public hearing to order at 11:43 a.m.

The Clerk read the notice of public hearing and stated that the notice had been duly published.

Chairman Knapp asked for speakers wishing to be heard.

Mary Cunningham:

- Sad day, we have a process that is unbelievably poor; had 15 county legislators sign a pledge to do nonpartisan; to work towards nonpartisan redistricting; 9 reneged on their pledge
- I would like them to stand up and identify themselves; these people are representing me; I would like to see them
- What 9 people reneged on that promise; standup if you believe in it; otherwise I assume you are ashamed
- This present redistricting 10 years ago was done with a member that is the present County Executive, was part of commission of redistricting; that was not nonpartisan, bipartisan, impartial or fair
- Here again and happening again; process that is disenfranchising many areas
- 16<sup>th</sup> ward in city; last ward with full city representation; representation for black population; slowly and meticulously dismantled
- I come from village of Fayetteville; village of Manlius taken out of town of Manlius; it is now with LaFayette and Pompey; how is that keeping communities of interest; how is that following NYS constitution
- Town and village of Dewitt being split up into 4 parts; that is not keeping community of interest
- Other areas still, after all comments first time around, still being broken up
- City 1/3 of county population; it does not have 1/3 of county representatives; there should be 1/3 of city sitting in the room; it is not; breaking up city districts; see on #3 that you can keep 6 districts in city
- That would be 1/3; that would be fair; that would be impartial; that is what it would be
- Remind you, I am just an everyday citizen, but we need to preserve and protect communities of interest, and we are not; shame on you

Jaqueline LaSonde:

- Good morning and happy holidays; not sure how happy they are for people who continue to fight a fight that has already been fought
- I am a resident and activist in 16<sup>th</sup> district; have representatives who are supposed to be speaking up and advocating for us; shame on process that continues to unfold in front of us

- Not a southern thing, or another state; it is right here in a place that is already struggling; 16<sup>th</sup> district, ward dismantled; give this one thing with I81 coming down, and take redistricting, slice and dice us, until we are not represented properly
- Laws in place to protect us, but they are not working; because you have to follow the rules first
- Voter registration, get people out to vote; What are we voting for if you continue to tell voters that their vote does not really count; we are going to work just as hard to make sure
- Not going to be 10 years with a district that does not make any sense; does not recognize or represent us
- Yes, we are a majority minority; we go through the process of t-shirts and informing folks; going to continue to do that work; going to be proactive; we are not going to let you win at this game of cheating
- If you do not follow the rules, then we are going to continue to find attorneys that will represent us, because our elected officials, some here, sometimes they are taking deals they should not; or making plans, or promising things, and not asking us; do not represent people and do not bother to ask or talk to us; problem
- Word in news about public meeting; it is a sham, and it is a shame that it is a sham; want to be heard and represented; not going away; have legal representation; count on it; we are here for it
- Do not make us have to do something you should be doing, because it is the right thing to do
- We are majority minority; you know what that means; you need to make us lessened or weakened
- I appreciate your time, but I do not appreciate taking time out of a day; tomorrow we will be distributing food to people who do not, or cannot afford it, or have accessibility to food
- Have to stop all our dealings to come here and beg for our humanity; stand on shoulders of Martin Luther King, and all who came before us; no intention of going backward as these rights are being striped and peeled away from us; appreciate your time, and look for us in the future

#### Charles Pierce-El:

- Good morning everybody; 12 o'clock has not set in yet; thank you all, chair for having public meeting here today; thank all legislators for being here, and guests
- As stated earlier in last public hearing, for the suppression going on in my community; going on for a long time; tired of it; still struggle
- I'm 75 years old; still out in community, particularly south side of Syracuse; underrepresented in this capacity
- Lot of African Americans in the political process; they vote; they want to vote and participate
- But when you take these things away from our children, who are coming up and able to vote in next couple years, they will say two persons ahead spoke about voter suppression, and they do not think their vote counts
- It does count collectively; individually it does not count at all; thank Chair for vetoing this thing
- We do not want to go to court; we do not want Syracuse to be on the map, that we are going to court, because something is not right in our county
- Onondaga County one of the best counties in the United States of America; if you do the history, we are one of the first people with industrialization with the salt mine
- We have a lot of jewels in the community, but we need to come together; just because you look different than me, does not mean we do not have the same ideologies behind us
- You care for your family, as I care for mine; you love your children, as I like mine; your blood is just like my blood
- If I needed your help and something happened to me, I'm going to try to get your blood, and I hope you would do the same with me, if I was the only one that could save you; life is precious
- We need to set examples, particularly with politics; you guys, young ladies, and men are here to help represent us and follow the constitution, not only the federal government, but the state of New York's constitution
- We are able to do all these things; train and talk to children, community about constitution, because it is very important
- We the people are the government; you guys are the reps, we put our trust, our lives, and our love in you guys to do the right things, not just for us or yourselves, but for Syracuse and Onondaga County
- Want to make sure you understand that we are tired; think we had 10 voting locations for early voting, and they took 6 away – people in senior high rises cannot just go downstairs and vote; have to walk to Westcott Street to vote
- Those on Brighton have to get a ride to get picked up if they want to vote; seniors do not go vote like that
- i.e. Senior down the street has been voting for 20 something years; they were told they were not listed, and they have to sign off on absentee ballot; crazy; these things are happening in the community; whether you know it or feel it
- I want to make sure as our elected officials, you sit down, be bipartisan, and get things right, not just your community, but for the whole city and Onondaga County
- Thank you for your time

Alexander Williams was called, but was not present.

Pete King:

- Good morning legislature, and thank you for coming here and doing your jobs, and thank you for your efforts
- Cut to chase; as far as I know this stuff is due in 2022; What's this about?
- Already made comments that this relates to social breakdown, with lack of communication, we could do a list
- This needs process; this is a serious thing; seems to be going under the rug right before Christmas, and last one before Thanksgiving
- Would like to see an analysis; have not looked at these options; cannot tell you which one to do; have not had time
- I would like to see an analysis of goodness of fit, voter proportionality; there are number of things you should be looking at; independently of politics; if this is a new science, I hear fair independent redistricting is a hot new topic
- Number of you voted for that two years ago; do not see evidence today that it has been followed; do not want to spread my aerosols any more, as I might have COVID, you might have COVID
- Not a good time for this; recommend serious public process for this; think you would get some returns if you choose that; thank you and good day

Casey Cleary-Hammarstedt:

- During the season of darkness, during this devastating global pandemic, during this time when American democracy is imperiled; we need to focus on hope; I'll speak to you today, because I still have hope that you will do the right thing
- I have hope that you will send these maps back to the Reapportionment Commission; I have hope that you will resist the pressure to make a premature decision on the aquarium as well
- The maps - there has been too little work put into making maps; you deserve to be proud of this claiming as your best work; you can do better; we as a county would be better served by articulation of criteria, by which maps will be drawn
- We have all now read a third party evaluation of the three maps before you, which were assessed on 4 criteria: proportionality, competitiveness, minority representation, and compactness
- The maps put forth by Democrats were shown to rate better on all 4 criteria; the maps put forth by Republicans are worse than the current maps on 3 criteria – proportionality, compactness, and minority representation
- Do you doubt that result? Do you have additional criteria by which you think the maps should be evaluated?
- Tell us what that criteria is; put aside that doubt, establish criteria, and come up with maps that we can all agree on
- The decision does not need to be made today; you are choosing to rush it, as if your majority is at stake; your majority is not at stake in the Dem maps; a map that truly threatens your majority will never come to pass, so why do you rush?
- Why do you insist making this only on the criteria of partisanship?
- You can do better; you can be better; the aquarium is interrelated in my mind, because we come up with things like this, because we do not have a balance in our discussions and clear criteria by which we evaluate them
- Please explain to us, using basic math, how the rosy projection of \$796,000 in sales tax revenue annually, justifies an \$85 mil investment in an aquarium
- We invest \$85 mil in a highly risky adventure, and expect a return on investment in 207 years; I am not a businessperson, but I recognize that that math does not add up; seriously explain to us how you think about that
- Has the local Republican party abandoned any commitment to the idea to limited government?
- Have you also decided that the market is irrelevant? The market did not decide to put an aquarium there; they could have at any point in the past decades; you are intending to supplant the market
- Have you given up on the idea that investments should show a return?
- I kept thinking about John DeFrancisco in the last few weeks; I wonder who among you has the courage to take a stance that may be unpopular in your party, but is clear eyed in principle and based on intelligence
- It took decades to prove John DeFrancisco was right about Destiny; he warned, "that we face a very real danger of investing in boondoggles."
- That boondoggle not only destroyed malls and other businesses throughout our county, it still has not lived up to the promise of generating \$20 mil in annual property taxes
- What is going to happen to a mall valued at \$203 mil, but is in debt for \$715 mil; despite all public investment and forgone tax revenue that this community gave it
- We need to know the answer to this before you take \$85 mil more and throw it into that black hole
- Wish I could say more

## Connor Sullivan:

- I'm not one much for public speaking; given the fact that I've lived here for my entire life, and this will effect next 10 years, I feel it is imperative for me to be here today; if I get high-pitched, bear with me
- I'm from Baldwinsville, born and raised; see two maps divided into 2 different towns, where we are one cohesive unit; it does not make sense to me; not the only district that does the same
- We see the same thing in DeWitt, Manlius; 2 of these maps take districts straight out of the city, and crack and pack them into miles away; does not seem very fair
- If we want to have a functional democratic legislature, we need to have people that represent the interests of those community members; if we cannot have discussion that is required
- We need to have good dialogue; in order to do that, we have to have competitive districts; I think it is imperative for us to move forward, rethink process, given the fact that we have until 2023
- We have time, and yet we are here rushing, in the middle of the week, right before Christmas, in the middle of the day; whereas everyone has work and somewhere whereas everyone else has to be somewhere else
- I guess that is what I'm here for; the fact that not only is my district and my home being divided, but many others too
- I know there is a better way; I'm asking you to reconsider trying to be nonpartisan, to be human; we all are; thank you

## David Rufus:

- Good afternoon and thank you for giving us an opportunity to speak this afternoon
- My name is David Rufus, and I am a senior organizer with NYCLU (New York Civil Liberties Union)
- Today, I wanted to speak briefly to you about the opportunity we have here in order to give people a chance to have a participatory plan that would allow people to engage and be involved in your new drawing of maps
- I think one thing that is critical for us, that there has been maps drawn of the 16<sup>th</sup> district that clearly affects the possibility of cracking black vote in that area; very concerned about that
- We need to have a chance for a professional to look at these maps, review them, overlook them, give people an opportunity to make comments
- One thing that is most critical, is that if you crack the 16<sup>th</sup> in order to create another majority minority district in the city, it does not give the 16<sup>th</sup> a chance to have a true opportunity to participate
- What I plan to do is, I have written a letter to the legislature, and I would like to submit that letter via email
- We have had technical difficulties printing and producing it; I'm trying to produce it; I would like for you to receive the letter, review the letter, and hopefully make a decision based on that information that we have submitted
- One other thing that we think is important, is that you find a group of professionals at the PHD level to help redesign these maps; that look at the city and talk about the city in a way that is equitable for everybody living in it
- Right now, opposition is that there needs to be more time; there needs to be another chance for the maps to be reviewed at publicly; I know there are some restrictions, requirements that you have to meet, and there are things you need to do
- We ask that you surrender those things in order to give us an opportunity to make sure that the folks in the neighborhood are truly represented by this redesign that you are asking to do
- We have had a chance to talk to some folks, but one things that is most valuable is that when you look at those maps and the way they have been designed, it hurts the 16<sup>th</sup>; it crack it, it whacks it, it destroys it
- It moves s out of the possibility of being able to vote as neighbors, vote as friends, vote as people who have lived in this neighborhood for more than 20-30 years
- I am a 60 years resident of this community; I live in 16<sup>th</sup>, I always have, and it is my duty bound that we make sure we look at this thing again, to make sure we get a chance to revisit it at some level
- I know many of you look at me and think, then what the heck are we going to do, why do we need to start over?
- It is not whether or not you need to start over; it is whether or not you need to create a process that allows for all of us to participate; that gives us a chance to be part of decision making process
- I thank you for that time; thank you Mr. Knapp; I appreciate the time for us to talk today; I will submit the letter

## Marguerite Ross:

- Good afternoon Mr. Chairmen, County Legislators, and esteemed fellow citizens that are here today; I want to give a shout out to my fellow citizens who cared enough to stand up for our voting rights, our constitutional rights
- Thank you for coming; it ain't easy to come out; I'm an old lady going on 75 years old; it is very stressful to me, and I'm sure many others, to schlep downtown to talk at the convenience of our so called public servants
- Can't find a parking space, have a family crisis and can't get down here; I'm late; better late than never, I hope

- I am fortunate enough to be a native born citizen of the village of Fayetteville, in the town of Manlius, in the County of Onondaga, in the state of New York, in the United States of America, and we have rights; we have rights that must be respected by our public servants; it must
- You have a sworn oath, all of you elected officials; you have to uphold the constitution of the United States, and you are violating our voting rights by gerrymandering the majority
- My representative, Mr. Kevin Holmquist, I used to think a lot of him, but since he fought the impartial redistricting two years ago, I don't really have much respect for him
- It is so sad that in his last days serving a pretty honorable career at the legislature and before that as a public servant; it is sad that he is going out on such a low note the way that he's heading
- He told me, he told me, we don't need any more time, because not one single vote will change; I asked him, but I didn't get an answer, what vote are you talking about? Are you talking about the vote on November 12<sup>th</sup>, where it was 9 to 8
- Who are the ayes and nays; I hope, and I'm not going to beg; it is beneath my dignity as a citizen of this great country to beg y'all to serve the citizens; if your mind is made up and you have already decided, it would not do any good any way for me to demean myself by begging you
- So I am more petitioning and maybe I'm demanding you serve the citizens and you better do your job; so I think if it is the case that it is still 9 to 8, I think we just need one vote to swing it over to right side; we only need one vote
- I know people have been subject to lobbying; lot of pressure coming from the Republicans to those who stood up on November 12<sup>th</sup>; 2 Republicans stood up with the people
- I bet you have been subjected to a lot of pressure to switch your vote, but I will appeal to you, and every right minded person in this county legislature, to reconsider, to be open minded; How do I want you to vote?
- First of all, I want you to adopt the resolution to amend, or local law, to amend the Administrative Code to make clear there is no urgency in pushing through this redistricting; that is number 1
- If you do not pass that local law, then I'm asking that you vote for map #3, which for many of us, including in my area, is the better map; so there is much that I could say, and it is kind of a shame that I am confined to 3 minutes
- I want to say three things in closing: stress, stress, gerrymandering, stress
- (1) Putting us under, 4 days before Christmas, undue stress on the people rushing this through
- (2) We are under great stress dealing with COVID; we have an emergency
- (3) We have a democratic emergency (small da); we have an emergency where gerrymandering, our rights are all being violated under noses; every time we turn around; and you are compounding the stress on us, that we do not need
- If COVID does not kill us, the stress is going to kills us; that is about the size of it, so give us a break
- For crying out loud, give us a break; we do not need this stress; we need to start over again with an impartial redistricting and we need to take our time, and we need to do it right
- Mr. Holmquist finally, I want you to vote on the side of your constituents

#### Charlene Tarver

- Good afternoon to the chair of this great legislature, and to all of our legislative representatives that are here
- My name is Charlene Tarver, I'm the founder and CEO of the Women's Economic Institute; we were originally founded in 2017 in Phoenix, Arizona, and expanded our reach into Central New York in 2021
- I was born and raised in Syracuse, NY; I left Syracuse 33 years ago; it is an honor and pleasure to be back here in Syracuse; I have tremendous confidence and faith in this legislature
- I think we are in an unheralded moment in our history; a moment where we have the opportunity and you have the opportunity to address some of the systemic issues that have taken place in this community
- I was out in Arizona, and I had a colleague of mine, who shared with me the concentrated black and brown poverty in Syracuse, NY; around the nation people are watching; people are watching the environmental injustices, the social injustices, the racial injustices, the structural racism that existed in this state, specifically in this city
- You cannot have the highest black and brown concentrated poverty in the wealthiest state in the nation
- I implore you to please go back to the drawing board on this particular issue; I will not rehash what my colleagues have already stated; this is racial gerrymandering; legislative district 16 must remain intact
- We must consider the basis of legislative district 16; we all know the history of America when it comes to racism, slavery, segregation; we know that in marginalized communities, people do not vote
- Often times they do not vote, because they do not believe in the power of the vote; and they have historically been excluded from the vote
- You are the representation; you are statesmen in a state that is well positioned, well qualified, well endowed
- I ask that you in this moment, as we are in the face of the pandemic, that you do what is right for your fellow man

- Not based upon partisan lines; let us go back to the drawing board; let us give adequate time to address this particular issue in the redistricting, and let us come forward with something that is fair, equitable, and inclusive
- When you look back on this moment in history, I would like to see you be on the right side of that; I have all faith and confidence in you; that is why I am here after 33 years, I am returning to this community to help you and support you in doing what is right, so we can create a more inclusive Syracuse
- So that you do not have a city surrounded and embarrassed by its poverty
- I encourage you to stand up as a legislator, send this back to the drawing board; create an impartial committee to look at this and come forward with something that makes us a greater city; thank you

Chairman Knapp stated that concludes the people that signed in, and he asked if there is anyone else wishing to speak at this time on this topic. Hearing none, Chairman Knapp adjourned the meeting at 12:23 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jm', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

JAMIE McNAMARA, Clerk  
Onondaga County Legislature