



The Board of County Commissioners
County of Hunterdon
State of New Jersey

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John E. Lanza, Director
Zachary T. Rich, Deputy Director

J. Matthew Holt, Commissioner
Shaun C. Van Doren, Commissioner
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February 14, 2022

Dear Members of the Reapportionment Commission:

I write this letter not only as the Director of the Board of Hunterdon County Commissioners, but as a resident of the County's largest municipality (Raritan Township) and the owner of a business in the County Seat (Flemington). My comments are not only prompted by my own review of the two draft legislative maps presented last week, but by the concerns of many Hunterdon County citizens who rightly feel disenfranchised by the plans proposed by both parties thus far.

It has been a long-established redistricting principle that counties with populations capable of fitting within a single legislative district should remain intact. With minor exceptions, such was largely the case until the last round of redistricting in 2011, where the prevailing Democratic map carved our county of roughly 130,000 residents into three legislative districts (15, 16 and 23), where we represented a plurality of voters in none of them. Whereas many watchers of this process from my county saw redistricting as an opportunity to remedy a map that crippled Hunterdon's representation in Trenton, one map released last week makes marginal improvements, while the other only makes matters worse.

The proposal dubbed "Parkway" perpetuates the practice parceling the county into three districts, thus unduly diluting the representation of Hunterdon's citizens by reducing them to a minority of the population in all three. Although I welcome the movement of our largest municipality (Raritan) and the County Seat (Flemington) into District 23, where they join many other similarly situated Hunterdon towns (e.g. Clinton Township and Clinton Town), the proposal chops off Readington Township to feed a Somerset dominated District 16 and sends the largely rural south of the county (Delaware, East Amwell and West Amwell) to be politically swamped by Mercer County voters in urban Trenton and inner suburban Ewing and Lawrence in District 15. To highlight the most glaring flaw of the Parkway map one must consider the following scenario; over one-third of Hunterdon's population feeds the Hunterdon Central Regional High School

sending district (Flemington, Raritan, Readington, Delaware and East Amwell). Under the Parkway map, the 45,000-50,000 citizens who share this common high school will be represented by three different sets of legislators in three different districts and will have a determinative say as to whom those legislators will be in none of them.

Despite my criticism of the Parkway map, it is nevertheless superior to the proposal deemed “Turnpike.” Likewise, this proposal dismembers Hunterdon into three districts (15, 16 and 23), but tosses roughly 40% of the county’s population—which is mostly exurban and rural and includes the largest municipality (Raritan) and the county seat (Flemington)—into a district dominated by an urban and inner suburban population in Mercer (Trenton, Ewing, Lawrence). This is merely the expansion of a failed experiment from 2011.

Hunterdon is relatively homogeneous in demography, density, and political orientation. Our largest townships are exurban in character, surrounding smaller towns and boroughs that serve as their respective “town squares.” The remaining townships in Hunterdon are rural, dominated by the presence of preserved farms and other agricultural uses.

Demographically and geographically, Hunterdon shares more in common with its neighbors to the east (Somerset) and north (Warren) than it does with Mercer. Western Somerset County and all of Warren County face similar public issues, confronting and controlling sprawl, preserving and maintaining open space and fighting the perpetual cuts to their school funding from Trenton. Besides simply being geographically contiguous, Warren Hunterdon and Somerset share common political interests.

By virtue of the relationships amongst the neighboring county governments, there are communities in interest with Warren and Somerset, that do not exist with Mercer. Hunterdon County shares a community college with Somerset. It collaborates in delivery of several county services in Warren (including the housing of inmates at its jail—a service previously shared with Somerset). Hunterdon’s court system is linked to Somerset and Warren in the Supreme Court’s delineation of Vicinage XIII. On the other hand, Hunterdon shares little more with Mercer than a border.

As it currently stands, East Amwell, West Amwell and Lambertville are incorporated into District 15. Its representatives are—unsurprisingly—from Ewing, Trenton and Pennington. Just this past year, when we sought redress of \$3 million in aid cuts to Hunterdon County schools, while the rest of the State was showered with over \$400 million in additional funding, our pleas fell on deaf ears in District 15. This is just one example of how a more densely populated county’s political domination of a rural and exurban portion of Hunterdon disenfranchised its voters and trampled

its dissimilar and divided neighbor's interests. It does no favors to the voters of Hunterdon County to incorporate an even greater portion of its population—including its largest township and its county seat—into a district where their votes are still not determinative, and their points of view are empirically proven to be politically irrelevant to its representatives.

By citing the example of District 15's current representatives, I am in no way disparaging them. They have done what any representatives would be expected to do: to resolve any differences on the issues in favor of the majority of the people they represent. There exists a chasm between the interests of those on either side of the Hunterdon-Mercer border. As the Turnpike map is drawn, my constituents will never be on the winning side of that divide. My point is not to suggest that District 15 has bad representatives, but that Hunterdon is a bad fit when lumped with a population dominated by voters with grossly dissimilar interests and political orientations on issues of public concern.

As a consequence, on behalf of the voters of a county with a population of 130,000, I implore this Commission to treat Hunterdon County fairly, to adhere to long held principles of redistricting and reject its treatment under both maps and to incorporate it into a single district with neighbors with which it shares common interests, services, and beliefs.

I thank the Commission for its consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John E. Lanza', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

John E. Lanza,
Raritan Township,
Director, Hunterdon County Board of Commissioners