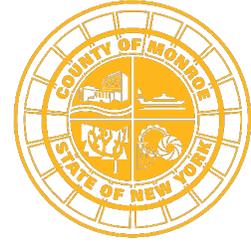




News from the Office of
Adam J. Bello
Monroe County Executive



**For immediate release:
Monday, January 10, 2022**

**MONROE COUNTY EXECUTIVE ADAM BELLO VETOES PARTISAN
REDISTRICTING BILL — PROPOSES LEGISLATION CREATING AN
INDEPENDENT REDISTRICTING COMMISSION**

(Rochester, New York) — Monroe County Executive Adam Bello today vetoed last year’s Republican supermajority redistricting plan, citing the overly partisan process and lack of sufficient public input. Instead, Bello introduced legislation creating an independent redistricting commission that puts the public interest ahead of party politics.

“The Republican Majority’s redistricting process last year was deeply flawed. It lacked transparency, and meaningful public input and did not provide adequate information about the proposed districts to legislators or the public,” said Bello. “We must start over with an improved process. Creating an independent redistricting commission will ensure that voters have confidence that the redistricting process is fair and impartial.”

In addition to the other process flaws, the adoption of last year’s redistricting law did not comply with the Municipal Home Rule Law, which requires that any local law be “in its final form and . . . upon the desks or tables of the members [of the Legislature] at least seven calendar days . . . prior to its final passage.” County Legislators received the Republican supermajority bill the day before the final vote.

The Bello-proposed independent commission’s goal is to draw compact, contiguous districts to avoid dividing Towns, Villages, and neighborhoods within the City of Rochester to the greatest extent possible. The Commission’s process will be transparent, with meetings open to the public. In addition to its regular meetings, the Commission will hold at least three public hearings prior to the completion of its work, at least one of which must occur after the Commission unveils its proposed plan.

The eight-member independent body would be comprised of community representatives and the Commissioners of the Board of Elections. Elected officials, political party officials, lobbyists, and the relatives of those individuals will not be eligible to serve on the Commission.

Both the Veto message and new independent commission local law were sent to the Monroe County Legislature today.

Media inquiries:

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Office of the County Executive

Adam J. Bello
County Executive

January 7, 2022

Mr. David Grant
Clerk of the Legislature
Monroe County Legislature
407 County Office Building
Rochester, New York 14614

Dear Mr. Grant:

This is in response to your letter of December 20, 2021, in which you presented a Local Law entitled "Amending Monroe County Charter and Administrative Code Relating to Legislative Redistricting and Term of Office of Members of County Legislature" (Intro. No. 556 of 2021), which was certified by you to have been adopted by the Monroe County Legislature at a meeting held on December 17, 2021. Pursuant to Municipal Home Rule Law § 21 and § C2-7(A)(3)(c) of the Monroe County Charter, with this letter I am providing notice to the Legislature that I have disapproved this Local Law and am returning it to you with my objections.

The redistricting process leading to the adoption of this Local Law was flawed from start to finish. Redistricting was rushed in an apparent effort to meet an artificial, politically motivated end-of-year deadline. Because of this rush, the process was haphazard and riddled with errors. The manner in which redistricting was conducted lacked transparency, failed to allow for meaningful public input, and did not provide adequate information about the proposed districts, or amendments to the proposed districts, to Legislators or the public. For all these reasons, which are further detailed below, the Local Law resulting from this failed process must be rejected, and a new redistricting effort worthy of the public's trust must begin.

The Legislative District Revision Commission Lacked Transparency and Did Not Allow for Meaningful Public Input.

The problematic redistricting process began with the work of the Legislative District Revision Commission. Although the Redistricting Commission held three public hearings, these meetings were poorly publicized and provided little opportunity for meaningful public comment. Members of the public were only permitted two minutes each to speak, constraining their opportunity to provide detailed input to the Commission. Further, the public had no way of knowing what proposals the Commission was considering, because no proposed maps were discussed or released prior to any of the Commission's public meetings.



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The Commission never discussed the public's input in subsequent meetings. During these meetings, there was no public deliberation by the Commission. Its meetings were called on short notice, with one meeting called with so little notice that a quorum was not present. Instead of engaging in a transparent process, the Redistricting Commission conducted its work in secret, minimizing the opportunity for public input or scrutiny of its work. In fact, at least two of the five members of the Commission had no input into the process by which the maps were drawn. A Republican member of the Commission acknowledged that the maps would be drawn by Republican operatives, not the Commission itself.

The Redistricting Commission's work culminated in a meeting held on the Monday morning following the Thanksgiving holiday weekend, with members of the Commission only receiving notice of the meeting on the Sunday of that holiday weekend. The proposed maps were only circulated to the Commission the morning the meeting was held, providing a woefully inadequate amount of time to review them before voting. Nevertheless, the Redistricting Commission voted to approve the maps on a party-line vote, sending its redistricting proposal to the Legislature.

The Legislature Amended the Proposed District Boundaries Without Any Public Input and Without Adequate Time for Consideration.

The Legislature held a Special Meeting on December 9 to consider the Commission's redistricting proposal. At a public hearing prior to that meeting, constituents raised a number of concerns, including the rushed and secretive nature of the Redistricting Commission's work, the unnecessary division of neighborhoods, villages, and towns in certain districts, and other districts which are not compact and span multiple communities with a range of different interests. Further, community members correctly noted that the lack of available information made it difficult to understand the new district lines, with the Legislature only making available PDF maps that were difficult to read and did not clearly show street-level detail, making it challenging for the public to even understand what proposed district they reside in.

The Legislature did not address the many concerns expressed by community members at this meeting. Instead, Legislators introduced an amendment drawn up before the meeting that significantly changed the boundaries of a number of proposed districts. The amended maps and text of the amended local law were briefly flashed across the screen of the Legislature's remote Zoom meeting, but were not sent to Legislators. There was no opportunity for Legislators or the public to substantively review the amended maps. Nevertheless, the Legislature voted on these maps they had just briefly seen, adopting the amendment. The Legislature then adjourned, recognizing at the time that they were required to wait seven days, exclusive of Sunday, after the redistricting Local Law was in its final form before adopting it.



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The Legislature Hurried to Adopt the Revised Local Law Without Complying with the Municipal Home Rule Law.

On December 17, the Legislature convened another Special Meeting to consider the amended districts. However, the amended text of the Local Law was only sent to Legislators on the afternoon of December 16, the day before the meeting. Because of this delay, the Legislature's adoption of the amended Local Law violated Municipal Home Rule Law § 20(4), which requires that any local law be "in its final form . . . and upon the desks or tables of the members [of the Legislature] at least seven calendar days, exclusive of Sunday, prior to its final passage."

Although some Legislators raised this legal flaw, the Legislature's Republican-led supermajority ignored them and voted to adopt the Local Law. Not only did they ignore procedural concerns, they also voted to cut off debate, stifling discussion of the substance of the redistricting proposal. This left many questions and concerns regarding the district lines unanswered.

* * * * *

At the public hearing I held to receive community feedback regarding this redistricting proposal, I heard the disappointment and frustration caused by this flawed process. Every single speaker at the hearing urged me to veto this redistricting Local Law. I agree wholeheartedly that this Local Law cannot stand and local redistricting must proceed in a manner that instills faith that government is working for the people it represents.

In 2020, well before this redistricting process began, I introduced a local law that would have created an independent redistricting commission. Unfortunately, the Legislature failed to bring this proposal to a vote. An independent commission would ensure that redistricting proceeds in a non-partisan manner and considers the interests of the broader community rather than petty partisan politics. I will be reintroducing a proposal to immediately constitute an independent redistricting commission.

The redistricting process leading to the adoption of this Local Law was deeply flawed from start to finish. Our County government must do better. For these reasons, I have disapproved the Local Law entitled "Amending Monroe County Charter and Administrative Code Relating to Legislative Redistricting and Term of Office of Members of County Legislature" (Intro. No. 556 of 2021).



Office of the County Executive

Adam J. Bello
County Executive

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Adam Bello".

Adam J. Bello
Monroe County Executive

Enc.





Office of the County Executive

Monroe County, New York

Adam J. Bello
County Executive

January 7, 2022

To The Honorable
Monroe County Legislature
407 County Office Building
Rochester, New York 14614

Subject: Enact a Local Law Amending the Monroe County Charter to Establish an Independent Redistricting Commission

Honorable Legislators:

I recommend that Your Honorable Body enact a local law amending the County Charter to establish an Independent Redistricting Commission.

Late last year, Your Honorable Body passed a local law redrawing legislative district boundaries. Last year's redistricting process was deeply flawed. It lacked transparency, failed to allow for meaningful public input, and did not provide adequate information about the proposed districts to Legislators or the public.

We must start over with an improved process. Creating an Independent Redistricting Commission will ensure that voters have confidence that the redistricting process is fair and impartial. This local law will amend the Charter to create an independent body comprised of community representatives and the Commissioners of the Board of Elections. Elected officials, political party officials, lobbyists, and the relatives of those individuals will not be eligible to serve on the Commission.

The Independent Commission will draw compact, contiguous districts that will seek to avoid dividing Towns, Villages, and neighborhoods within the City of Rochester to the greatest extent possible. The Commission's process will be transparent, with meetings open to the public. In addition to its regular meetings, the Commission will hold at least three public hearings prior to the completion of its work, at least one of which must occur after the Commission unveils its proposed plan.

The specific legislative actions required are:

1. Schedule and hold a public hearing on the proposed Local Law.
2. Enact a Local Law to amend the Monroe County Charter to Establish an Independent Redistricting Commission.

This proposed Local Law will require no additional net County support in the current Monroe County budget.

This action is a Type II Action pursuant to 6 NYCRR § 617.5(c) and is not subject to review under the State Environmental Quality Review Act.

I recommend that this matter be referred to the appropriate committee(s) for favorable action by Your Honorable Body.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Adam J. Bello". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "A" and "B".

Adam J. Bello
Monroe County Executive

AJB:db

By Legislators _____ and _____

Intro No. _____

LOCAL LAW NO. _____ OF 2022

ENACTING A LOCAL LAW AMENDING THE MONROE COUNTY CHARTER TO ESTABLISH AN INDEPENDENT REDISTRICTING COMMISSION

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE COUNTY OF MONROE, as follows:

Section 1. Section C2-12 of the Monroe County Charter is amended to read as follows:

§ C2-12. Number of districts; district boundaries; reapportionment.

A. Number of districts. For the purpose of electing County Legislators, Monroe County shall be divided into 29 districts. One County Legislator shall be elected to the County Legislature from each of said districts.

B. District boundaries. The description of the boundaries of the 29 legislative districts shall be set forth in § A4-4 of the Administrative Code. In the description of said districts, all references to towns and villages apply to that territory wholly contained in each of the towns and villages in the County bounded as of ~~April 1, 2010~~ the most recent regular federal census taken in the County. Said district boundaries shall be changed only by local law and in accordance with the reapportionment procedures and standards set forth in § C2-12C.

C. Reapportionment procedures and standards.

(1) The County Legislature shall appoint ~~a Legislative District Revision~~ an Independent Redistricting Commission ("Commission") to evaluate the existing legislative districts for equity and representation in relation to population as soon as practicable in the year 2022. ~~Thereafter, the Legislature shall appoint a Commission within six three months after the publication of the results of each regular federal census taken in the County; or within six three months after the publication of the results of any County-wide federal or special population census, taken pursuant to § 20 of the General Municipal Law of the State of New York, and held not more often than once every five years; or after any annexation which has the effect of increasing or decreasing the population of any legislative district by more than 40-5%.~~

(2) Such Commission shall consist of ~~the eight members, of the County Board of Elections, the President of the County Legislature and one person selected by the legislative members of each legally constituted political party represented on the County Legislature, who shall serve without compensation, appointed as follows:~~

(a) The two Commissioners of the Monroe County Board of Elections;

(b) Two retired judges that maintain their permanent residences in Monroe County, one to be appointed by the Majority Leader of the Monroe County Legislature and one to be appointed by the Minority Leader of the Monroe County Legislature;

- (c) Two representatives recommended by a publicly recognized organization committed to voters' rights, one to be appointed by the Majority Leader and one appointed by the Minority Leader of the Monroe County Legislature. The "publicly recognized organization committed to voters' rights" must have been legally incorporated at least two years prior to the formation of a Commission. For purposes of § C2-12, any political committee, as defined in Article 14 of the New York Election Law, shall not be considered a "publicly recognized organization committed to voters' rights";
- (d) Two representatives of a publicly recognized organization committed to the rights of racial or ethnic minorities, women, persons who identify as LGBTQ, or persons with disabilities, one to be appointed by the Majority Leader and one to be appointed by the Minority Leader of the Monroe County Legislature. The "publicly recognized organization committed to the rights of racial or ethnic minorities, women, persons who identify as LGBTQ, or persons with disabilities" must have been legally incorporated at least two years prior to the formation of a Commission. For purposes of § C2-12, any political committee, as defined in Article 14 of the New York Election Law, shall not be considered a "publicly recognized organization committed to the rights of racial or ethnic minorities, women, persons who identify as LGBTQ, or persons with disabilities"; and
- (e) Each Commission shall have a Chairperson, who shall be a member of the Commission elected by no less than five affirmative votes of all members of the Commission.

(3) Except for individuals appointed pursuant to § C2-12C(2)(a) and § C2-12C(2)(b), the following classes of individuals shall not be eligible to serve as members of a Commission:

- (a) Individuals who currently serve or have served in any elected federal, state, or local office in the immediately preceding ten years;
- (b) Individuals who currently hold or have held any political party position or any political party office, above the office of committee person, whether by election, appointment, or otherwise, during the immediately preceding five years;
- (c) Individuals who have served as a paid consultant or lobbyist retained by any candidate for public office or political party in the immediately preceding ten years; or
- (d) Individuals who are the parent, child, sibling, or spouse of any current member of the Monroe County Legislature or of any political party officer, above the office of committee person.

~~(3)~~ (4) The Commission shall study the population data and within three months after appointment make recommendations, if necessary, in the form of a proposed local law as to changes in the boundaries of legislative districts. The districts set forth in the proposed local law shall be as nearly equal in population as practicable and shall seek to avoid dividing towns, villages, and neighborhoods within the City of Rochester to the greatest extent possible.

~~(4)~~ (5) In its deliberations to redesign the legislative districts, the Commission shall comply with the equal protection clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution and, Article I, §§ 1 and 11, of the New York State Constitution, and § 34(4) of the New York State Municipal Home Rule Law. Further, legislative districts shall be of compact and contiguous territory to the extent possible.

(6) Five members of a Commission shall constitute a quorum for purposes of conducting the work of the Commission.

(7) Five affirmative votes of a Commission shall be required to adopt and submit a proposed local law to the County Legislature.

(8) A Commission shall hold regular and special meetings that shall be open to the public in accordance with New York's Open Meetings Law. A Commission shall maintain records of all proceedings. Special meetings shall be called by the Chairperson upon his or her initiative or upon written request of at least four Commission members. Notice of the time and place of regular meetings shall be made available to the public and media at least seven (7) days prior to such regular meetings and at least two (2) days prior to special meetings. Meetings shall be conducted in accordance with the latest edition of Robert's Rules of Order.

(9) Clerical services required by a Commission shall be provided on a bi-partisan basis by the Board of Elections. A Commission may receive and utilize such necessary data, resources, and facilities of Monroe County as it may reasonably request in order to discharge its duties.

(10) A Commission shall conduct at least three (3) public hearings within the County of Monroe for the purpose of soliciting input and information from the public. A Commission shall conduct at least one hearing prior to beginning its work on the reapportionment plan. At least one hearing shall be conducted following a Commission's completion of a proposed plan, but prior to a Commission's adoption of such plan. At least seven (7) days prior to the hearing concerning the proposed plan, a Commission shall make such plan available to the public and the media. A Commission shall provide at least seven (7) days prior notice to the public and media of the time and place of all hearings.

(11) Each Commission shall expire thirty (30) days after a local law is adopted pursuant to § C2-12C. Upon the expiration of each Commission, all records of a Commission and its proceedings shall be deposited with the Clerk of the Legislature.

(12) All vacancies in a Commission shall be filed in the same manner as their original appointments.

~~(5)~~ (13) Within sixty (60) days three months after the submission of the report of the Commission, which shall be submitted to the County Legislature in the form of a proposed local law, the Legislature shall conduct a public hearing on the proposed changes, if any, and shall then enact a local law setting forth revised district boundaries, subject to such permissive referendum as may be required pursuant to applicable state law. The local law adopted by the County Legislature shall be subject to the requirements of § C2-12C(4), § C2-12C(5), and other applicable law.

~~(6)~~ (14) If such local law is defeated by referendum, or is finally declared invalid by a court of competent jurisdiction, the Legislative District Revision Commission shall be reactivated to study and prepare a new proposed local law for submission to the County Legislature at least 150 days prior to the next general election, subject to the same procedures and requirements as provided above.

Section 2. If any clause, sentence, paragraph, subdivision, section, or part of this law or the application thereof to any person, individual, corporation, firm, partnership, entity, or circumstance shall be adjudged by any court of competent jurisdiction to be invalid or unconstitutional, such order or judgment shall not affect, impair or invalidate the remainder thereof, but shall be confined in its operation to the clause, sentence, paragraph, subdivision, section or part of this law, or in its application to the person, individual, corporation, firm, partnership, entity, or circumstance directly involved in the controversy in which such order or judgment shall be rendered.

Section 3. This local law shall take effect in accordance with the applicable provisions of the Municipal Home Rule Law and the Monroe County Charter.

_____ Committee; _____, 2022 - CV:

File No. 22-____.LL

ADOPTION: Date: _____

Vote: _____

ACTION BY THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

APPROVED: _____ VETOED: _____

SIGNATURE: _____ DATE: _____

EFFECTIVE DATE OF LOCAL LAW: _____

Added language is underlined.

Deleted language is ~~stricken~~.