



VOTERS FIRST

THE PROMISE OF CITIZEN-LED REDISTRICTING
IN NASSAU COUNTY

JANUARY 2014

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

The Nassau County United Redistricting Coalition is a nonpartisan civic engagement coalition supporting inclusive, balanced, and fair legislative redistricting in Nassau County. It comprises the following organizations:



Common Cause New York is the statewide New York chapter of Common Cause, dedicated to restoring the core values of American democracy, reinventing an open, honest, and accountable government that empowers ordinary people to make their voices heard. • www.commoncause.org/ny



La Fuente-Long Island Civic Participation Project is a Tri-State Worker and Community Fund that empowers immigrants, workers and their communities to take action through civic participation, grassroots organizing and leadership development. La Fuente works in collaboration with community organizations, faith institutions and labor unions to build a movement for a just society. • www.lafuenteinc.org



The League of Women Voters of Nassau County is a nonpartisan political organization encouraging informed and active participation in government. It influences public policy through education and advocacy. • www.lwvofnassaucounty.org



The Long Island Civic Engagement Table (LICET) transforms the culture of civic participation and government accountability on Long Island by nurturing grassroots participation and leadership in working-class communities of color. LICET is led by Make the Road NY, New York Communities for Change, the Central American Refugee Center, and the Long Island Immigrant Alliance. • www.livicengagement.org

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our democracy is founded on the ideal that everyone deserves a chance to be heard. Whatever community we live in or party we belong to, every citizen should have an equal opportunity to vote and to help direct the course of government.

The decennial redistricting process shapes voting power – legislative district lines determine not only the balance of party power, but affect how citizens are represented and whether government is responsive to their needs and interests.



VOTERS AT A 2012 NASSAU LEGISLATURE HEARING ON REDISTRICTING

Those drawing the lines must seek to configure legislative districts so that they have equal populations and do not dilute the strength of minority voters. Ideally, those drawing the lines seek to maintain districts that are compact and contiguous and respect political subdivision lines and communities of interest.

Unfortunately, the process of redistricting, one that was intended to ensure fair and equal representation, has become corrupted over time. Our research shows that if allowed the opportunity, the majority party will almost always take advantage of the process by gerrymandering for political advantage.

Nassau County is no exception. Redistricting here has been turbulent and litigious. In recent years, it was among the most controversial items of the Legislative calendar and painful for nearly everyone involved. As this report shows, the 2011-2013 redistricting fight in Nassau was spurred by confusion and internal conflict within the Nassau County Charter itself.

Voters will live with the current districts for the remainder of this decade, but now is the moment to repair the county charter and design a fair, common-sense redistricting process for the next decade.

To aid in this process the Nassau United Redistricting Coalition

undertook research in 22 jurisdictions in New York State and in four other states across the country to understand the successes, failures, and best practices associated with legislative redistricting. In this report, we outline findings of that research and make initial recommendations toward reform.

When we compare Nassau County’s experience to that of jurisdictions that have successfully undertaken reforms, core themes emerge:

- **The county charter should say what it means: provisions and principles should be clear, specific, and designed to make sure government truly works.**
- **An independent “citizen commission” is the best way to develop a truly fair and democratic map.**
- **Transparency and public input must be central throughout the process.**

Across the country, states and municipalities that have undertaken non-partisan reform demonstrate its positive impact on legislative effectiveness, public faith in government, and grassroots civic engagement.

A robust policy for Nassau County will only emerge from a healthy dialogue between elected officials, community groups, and voters. Reforming our charter to put the interests of voters before partisan interests will be tough work. But in a recent poll, 81% of registered Nassau voters said they support non-partisan re-districting. A perfect redistricting process is impossible, but an improved process is both possible and vital. The research and recommendations in this report are offered as a first step on the path to building a Nassau County that truly puts the voices of voters first.

THE PACKED HOUSE AT A 2013 COMMUNITY FORUM ON REDISTRICTING HOSTED BY LICET & LA FUENTE



WHAT IS REDISTRICTING?

“WHEN VOTERS WITH SIMILAR INTERESTS ARE DRAWN INTO A DISTRICT TOGETHER, THEIR VOICES MULTIPLY.”

Redistricting is the redrawing of electoral district lines to reflect changes in population measured by the United States Census. Redistricting occurs once every ten years, after the release of the new census and impacts all elections for the following decade. Under Article I of the U.S. Constitution, which mandates that redistricting for Congress must occur every 10 years, this process reflects a basic obligation of our democratic government: to ensure the equal rights and representation of all citizens. Every state and local representative body that elects its members from districts must also engage in redistricting to ensure that the constitutionally mandated “one person, one vote” principle is followed.

While the term “reapportionment” is often used interchangeably with redistricting, reapportionment actually refers to the distribution of the number of districts, not the redrawing of lines within a single jurisdiction. The shifting of the fixed number of 435 congressional districts between states to account for varying growth rates is an example of reapportionment.

Redistricting determines the communities and voters that a legislator will represent for the next decade. Depending on where the lines are drawn, redistricting can empower or disempower different communities of voters. A cohesive community of voters entirely within a single district is likely to have more influence over the outcome of the election, and therefore will likely receive more attention from the legislator and challenging candidates. When voters with similar interests are drawn into a district together, their voices multiply, giving them a greater opportunity to express their views, elect candidates of their choice, and hold their leaders accountable. Redistricting impacts who wins elections, what laws get passed, and what services a community receives.

Unfortunately, those in charge of redistricting rarely focus on maximizing good governance and effective representation. Most redistricting processes in the United States remain under the control of the political parties, in a proverbial case of the “fox guarding the henhouse.” In the redistricting context, legislators or mapping authorities may engage in “gerrymandering” (named after a 19th-century Massachusetts governor and master of the practice) to abuse the line-drawing process, in an attempt to influence the next decade of election results. Strategic partisan redistricting can seek to protect certain incumbents by adding more voters of their party to their districts, or can be used to attack other incumbents by dividing their core constituencies or drawing their residence into a district with another incumbent, thereby forcing a primary.

Such abusive line-drawing strategies can include:

“OPPORTUNITIES
FOR MEANINGFUL
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THE PROCESS.”

- ➔ *Respect for Communities of Interest* – District lines should respect local populations with shared socio-economic characteristics and political institutions that would benefit from unified representation by a single legislator. A local community with unified and cohesive political leadership tends to have stronger influence in the legislature. On the other hand, if a community with shared interests is redrawn and divided by political district lines, the representation of those interests will also be divided and weakened.
- ➔ *Compactness & Contiguity* – District shapes should be as compact as possible and districts should form one continuous shape and not be divided by impassable bodies of water or other obstacles.
- ➔ *Limiting Uses of Partisanship and Political Data* – The process for drawing districts should follow an “incumbent-blind” process and one that does not use any political data (percentages and actual data related to voter registration, voters’ membership data by political parties, election races, turnout rates by precinct, etc.) or seek to advantage any particular political party in drawing the lines.
- ➔ *Public Participation and Transparency* – Opportunities for meaningful public participation must be built into the process, and the data that is used to determine district boundaries should be readily available. To the maximum extent possible, discussions and determinations by the map drawer should be made in public. These factors will help educate the public and create greater understanding and satisfaction with the process.

NASSAU'S HISTORY

When a Legislature has the power to draw its own districts and gerrymander, the resulting process is often marked by contention and partisan recrimination. This held true for Nassau County with its redistricting process in 2011-2013, and was exacerbated by the inconsistencies in the county's charter.

The 2011-2013 county legislative redistricting process was only the latest skirmish in the struggle for power between the county's Democratic and Republican parties. When the Republican majority attempted to use the process to their political advantage and gerrymander districts to "pack" the county's Democrats into as few districts as possible, some argued that it was simple payback for the Democrat-led redistricting process in 2001. Whichever party is in the majority when redistricting occurs, partisan motives come into play.

When the parties wage war over districts, everyday voters are collateral damage. Partisan gerrymandering may be legal, but it isn't good for communities—or for democracy. Unless a county's charter specifically takes the redistricting process out of the parties' hands, the majority party, Democrat or Republican, will almost always attempt to gerrymander, especially in counties with highly competitive elections.

THE NASSAU COUNTY CHARTER ON REDISTRICTING

Nassau County's charter provisions on redistricting establish an advisory commission that must follow a specific timetable but leaves many details necessary for fair redistricting unaddressed.

- ➔ *The requirement of Section 112 (2) that the Nassau County Legislature issue a law describing new districts within six months of the release of census data does not clearly state how it relates to the requirement of Section 113 that sets up a temporary districting advisory commission and a time table for its work.*
- ➔ *Section 113 sets up an advisory entity, the Temporary Districting Advisory Commission..*
- ➔ *The Temporary Districting Advisory Commission is composed of 11 members, 10 evenly split between two political parties and a non-voting chairman appointed by the county executive.*
- ➔ *Section 113 (3) does not provide any specific requirements or procedures for public input into the redistricting process, other than to say that the commission "may hold public hearings to develop a redistricting plan."*
- ➔ *The Nassau County Charter provisions do not specify any criteria by which the district lines are to be drawn.*

2011-2013: THE CHARTER BREAKS DOWN

After the release of census data in March 2011, the majority in the County legislature moved quickly to pass a redistricting plan as outlined in Charter Section 112, skipping the temporary redistricting commission process.

After months of litigation, the State Supreme Court rejected the legislature's attempt to rush through a plan without the TDAC and developed a rationale² to unite the conflicting charter sections:

- ❶ *After the release of Census data, the legislature must develop and pass an interim map that will never take effect (per Section 112).*
- ❷ *Next, a Temporary Districting Advisory Commission (TDAC) is formed with political appointees from both parties (per Section 113). It is tasked with developing a bipartisan map which the legislature is free to ignore.*
- ❸ *Finally, the Legislature considers the TDAC map alongside any other submitted redistricting plans and passes one into law for the coming decade.*

Once the TDAC was finally appointed in May 2012, it failed to fulfill even its basic purpose, which was to produce a bipartisan compromise plan. From its first meeting in June 2012, it was apparent that the commission was divided and dysfunctional, with the five Republican-appointed members and the five Democratic-appointed members essentially acting as separate units, withholding information from one another and pursuing their own agendas.

The Nassau County United Redistricting Coalition was launched shortly thereafter to advocate for a fair and nonpartisan redistricting process.

On January 3, 2013, TDAC released two county legislature redistricting plans: one crafted and approved by the Republican half of the commission, and one crafted and supported by the Democratic half of the commission.

Because the commission was split 5-5 on partisan lines, neither plan was submitted to the legislature as the official recommendation of the commission. Instead, the two plans were sent to the legislature, alongside the nonpartisan plan offered by the Nassau United Redistricting Coalition as part of a record of the commission's activities. On February 5, the Republican majority in the legislature released a revised redistricting plan with significant differences from the January 3 Republican plan created by TDAC.⁴

On Monday, February 11, 2013, the Rules Committee of the legislature approved the Republican majority's plan by a party-line vote of 4 to 3, despite hours of testimony from dozens of Nassau constituents in opposition.⁵

The majority's plan, which eventually became law after minor changes made before the final vote on March 5, is a textbook example of a partisan gerrymander. Although Democrats actually slightly outnumber Republicans in Nassau County, the plan packs Democrats into seven districts where registered Democrats outnumber registered Republicans two to one. In the other 12 districts, Republicans outnumber Democrats 42 percent to 32 percent.

Instead of nine competitive districts, as were proposed in the coalition plan, the map has only four competitive districts. This contributed to the result that

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legislative elections in 2013 were far less competitive than in previous cycles, with only one of the new districts holding a highly competitive election contest (within 10 percent final margin).⁶

LESSONS LEARNED

A number of lessons can be learned from the 2011-2013 redistricting process in Nassau County:

- **Charter provisions should be clear and specific.** If required events are meant to be sequential, the charter itself should make that clear
- **Commissions should be structured to deliver results.** Gridlocked political appointees, and a 5-5 structure with no tie-breaker result in a failure of the process. As Republican Legislator Richard Nicoletto noted about Nassau's commission, "It's the way it's set up. It will probably always deadlock. It's a flaw in the county charter."⁷
- **Transparency and public input must be central to the process.** The public will always know more about the shape of communities than any small panel. If redistricting is to serve people, not politicians, the framework and frequency of that input must be specified and Commission meetings must be transparent and open to the public, with proper notice.
- **Redistricting principles should be "baked in" to the charter.** If the rights of racial and language minorities, basic fairness, non-partisanship, and respect for community borders are redistricting priorities for the people of Nassau County, our charter should say so. As we have seen, when the Charter is silent on principles, partisan interests will insert their own.

MODELS ACROSS NEW YORK STATE & BEYOND

In searching for the ideal reform to Nassau County’s redistricting process, the coalition undertook extensive research of the redistricting processes in other counties of New York State and across the country, in order to identify what worked and what didn’t, and to develop a set of policy recommendations that would make Nassau County a national model for good government and fair redistricting.

Outside of New York City (whose five boroughs are also each a county), the State of New York is divided into 57 diverse counties – from Hamilton, in the Adirondacks, with a population of fewer than 5,000, to Nassau and Suffolk with populations of 1.34 million and 1.5 million, respectively.

Most counties in the state have limited powers and operate under the general provisions of the New York State County Law. But 21 of the state’s counties have adopted county charters that establish broader home-rule powers and specific structures. All of the chartered counties have legislatures, and all except Schenectady County have single-member districts.

The Nassau County United Redistricting Coalition reviewed the county-level redistricting processes in New York’s 21 chartered counties. A tool for reviewing the redistricting process in each of 21 counties can be found on the coalition’s website, www.nassauunitedredistricting.org. In Appendix 1 to this report, we provide a brief review of five counties whose experiences we believe are most relevant and helpful in considering the ideal reform for Nassau County’s redistricting process: Erie, Suffolk, Ulster, Tompkins, and Westchester. These counties offer a sampling of the prevailing redistricting models:

ADVISORY COMMISSIONS

Westchester and Erie Counties have commissions that, either informally or through charter requirement, advise the legislature on possible district maps. In neither county was the use of advisory committees considered satisfactory for the most recent redistricting cycle (2011).

In Westchester, which has a tradition of an informal committee advising its legislature on redistricting, the committee’s recommendations were basically ignored,⁷ leading to acrimony and a plan that was publicly criticized and vetoed by the county executive.⁸ That veto was finally overridden.⁹

In Erie, the charter-required¹⁰ legislatively-appointed advisory committee drew a plan that was widely criticized¹¹ but ignored by the county legislature, which drew its own plan.¹² That plan was subsequently vetoed by the county executive,¹³ and the resulting stalemate threw redistricting of the legislature into the courts.¹⁴

INDEPENDENT COMMISSIONS

In Ulster and Suffolk Counties, the charters now require the appointment of redistricting commissions¹⁵, making this the first redistricting cycle with such a requirement. In Tompkins County, the charter requires the legislature to appoint a committee¹⁶, but does not specify structure. In 2011, the Tompkins Legislature chose to appoint an independent commission.¹⁷

In Ulster and Tompkins Counties, the independent commissions were considered successful and marked by bipartisan legislative action¹⁸. Commission plans were praised by reformers as fair and adopted by the County Legislatures by wide margins, although improvements have been recommended to both counties' procedures.¹⁹

In Suffolk County, a well-intentioned reform of the legislative redistricting procedure turned out to be overly restrictive and difficult to implement in practice. The Legislature and political parties took opportunities to torpedo the procedure, and regained control of redistricting. When the Democratic-controlled legislature then drew its own lines, self-interest and party warfare returned; the resulting districts have been widely criticized as gerrymandered.²¹

LESSONS LEARNED FROM NEW YORK COUNTIES

- **The majority in the legislature will nearly always gerrymander if given the opportunity.** The experience in Westchester, Suffolk, and Erie demonstrates that without clear, binding charter language, the majority party will typically not be able to resist the temptation to gerrymander.
- **“Advisory” commissions are often ineffective.** Erie parallels Nassau County in this regard—in both cases, the legislature was able to effectively ignore the work of the advisory commission, largely without consequence. Commissions must have the public support and/or legislative power to have their maps adopted without partisan interference.
- **Clearly defined redistricting criteria are needed in the charter.** In Ulster County, clear criteria in the charter led to a map that is widely regarded as fair. By contrast, in Erie, the advisory committee was not provided any map-drawing criteria by the charter, and political motives largely drove the process of drawing the map.
- **Charters should provide for budgetary and professional support for independent commission.**
- **Non-partisan criteria for commissioners should be clear, but realistic.** Suffolk's experience showed that retired judges are not ideal members of independent commissions and that the model of assigning commissioners by relationships to organizations (for example, a good government organization or a minority organization) may not be practicable.
- **Even-numbered commissions are a recipe for gridlock.** Suffolk's experience paralleled Nassau's in this regard.

- **If the commission is given an “expiration date,” after which the legislature takes over, it gives the legislature a powerful incentive to stall and wait for the commission to expire.** Suffolk’s experience all too clearly supports this conclusion. If the commission fails to take timely action, the fallback should be the courts.

OTHER INDEPENDENT REDISTRICTING PROCESSES

Useful models for independent redistricting commissions exist in several other jurisdictions, including in New York City, and outside of New York, in places including Arizona, California, and Austin, Texas.

A chart detailing the redistricting processes followed in Arizona, Austin, California and in New York City can be found on the Nassau United Redistricting Coalition website. Most instructive for our purposes are the selection procedures for commissioners in each of these jurisdictions, as well as the criteria that they use.

Two of the jurisdictions, California and Austin, use a selection process with random or lottery selection elements in choosing the members of the independent commission, in order to minimize any political influence. Both jurisdictions have auditors compile a pool of applicants from publicly solicited applications, grouped by political affiliation, from which a smaller pool is chosen by lottery. The legislature is then free to eliminate a set number from the pool. From that reduced pool, a number of Republican, Democratic and unaffiliated commissioners are chosen, again by lottery. These commissioners, in turn, choose the balance of the commissioners from the pool, seeking to assure geographic and ethnic/racial balance on the commission through their selections. While this process requires multiple steps, it is widely regarded as resulting in truly independent citizen commissions.

In Arizona, legislative leaders pick the commission members from a pool selected by the state’s appellate selection committee, and the members then pick an additional member not affiliated with any political party.

In New York City, the mayor and the City Council leaders share the appointment, which they accomplish directly, without any nominating pool of applicants. Nevertheless, the process is widely regarded to have resulted for several cycles in independent commissions that have successfully carried out a relatively nonpoliticized redistricting, which has not resulted in litigation.

In each of these jurisdictions, there are clear restrictions on who may serve on the redistricting commission. These restrictions minimize political influence and conflicts of interest by prohibiting elected representatives, party officials, public employees, and lobbyists from serving. California and Austin also go so far as to prohibit those who are large political contributors from serving.

Additionally, all four jurisdictions have particularly clear criteria to be applied by the independent commission in drawing district lines. California and Austin specifically prohibit consideration of incumbent or candidate residency and prohibit drawing lines that favor or disfavor any candidate or political party. All four have processes that specify a number of public hearings and other mechanisms for public input in the redistricting process.

“FIVE NEW YORK COUNTIES ARE MOST HELPFUL IN CONSIDERING THE IDEAL REFORM FOR NASSAU’S PROCESS: ERIE, SUFFOLK, ULSTER, TOMPKINS, AND WESTCHESTER.”

A REFORM PROPOSAL FOR NASSAU

Based on the redistricting experience under the current Nassau Charter and from our wide-ranging review of statewide and national redistricting models – the good and the bad – the *Nassau County United Redistricting Coalition* makes the following recommendations for reforming Nassau County’s redistricting process.

OVERALL FUNCTIONING OF THE COMMISSION

- **The commission should recommend a single map to the Legislature.** Any redistricting commission is intended to foster the sorts of tough choices and bipartisan compromise that are sometimes difficult for elected officials. If a commission does not clear this most basic threshold, it has failed. A single map helps to prevent the legislature from choosing among multiple options with short-term political interests in mind.
- **The commission should have an odd number of commissioners.** This is designed to prevent deadlock among members and guarantee that the commission ultimately proposes a single map to the legislature. There is some experience suggesting that a smaller group (fewer than 10) has an easier time working as a group, but that experience is by no means universal.
- **Commission staff should be nonpartisan, unified, and hired early in the process by the commission itself.** Compromise and reasoned discussion are unlikely when commission members have different experts with different sets of facts. Commissions are designed to act as a unit, and should be staffed accordingly. The experience of Ulster and Austin can provide models of how this can be successfully done.
- **The charter should establish a clear timeline for each critical event in the redistricting process.** Regardless of the process that the county chooses, there should be as much specificity and clarity as possible about what is expected.
- **The county should allocate adequate funding in advance.**

SELECTION OF COMMISSIONERS

- **Commissioners should be drawn by lottery from a pool of qualified applicants.** We recommend the use of a hybrid system similar to the one in Austin. Such a system allows a constitutional mechanism for ensuring

diversity across a large range of categories, and insulates the process from short-term political interests.

- **The commission should include Democrats, Republicans, and independents.** We recommend nine total commissioners: three Democrats, three Republicans, and three registered voters who are not affiliated with a party.
- **The county executive should be responsible for publicly advertising for applicants to the commission in advance of the lottery.** The pool of potential commission members is generated from all those who apply and meet criteria for commission. The county executive should ensure that the advertising for applicants appears in media that will reach as many different constituencies in Nassau County as possible, including (but not limited to) Spanish-language and other minority-language media, and media specifically serving the African-American community.
- **The first six commissioners – two Republicans, two Democrats, and two “blanks” – should be chosen by a lottery process.** The remaining

three commissioners (one in each party and a “blank”) should be chosen by the first commissioners with a goal of creating a commission that reflects the diversity of Nassau County, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, language, etc.



- **The lottery should include a mechanism for ensuring geographic diversity in the commission.** There are many possible mechanisms for accomplishing this. For example, the charter may require that each town is represented by no more than three commissioners: the fourth name

to be drawn from a given town would be set aside and the lottery would continue.

- **Whether applicants meet criteria should be decided by a third party.** In Austin, this is a group of auditors chosen by city staff from a list agreed on by the minority and majority leaders in the legislature. In other jurisdictions, judges perform the vetting. Whatever the mechanism, their discretion is limited to whether or not applicants meet the criteria for nonpartisanship.
- **The charter should specify a process for filling commission vacancies.**

NONPARTISAN CRITERIA FOR COMMISSIONERS

Drawing on the successful models in Ulster and New York City, and with an eye to lessons from Suffolk County, we recommend that the following categories of person be ineligible to serve on the commission:

- *Registered lobbyists*
- *Current employees of New York State or any county, town, village or other municipality or government authority in the state, or those who have been so employed in the previous five years*
- *Those currently in elected office at any level of government and those who have held elected office in the previous three years*
- *Current party officials and those who have served in that capacity in the previous five years*
- *Current paid consultants to a political party and those who have served in that role in the previous five years*
- *Immediate relatives of any member of the county legislature or of any political party official at or above the rank of committee member*

COMMISSION CHAIR & STAFF

- **The commission should choose its own chair from among the “blank” commissioners.** The timeline should specify that they do this at their first meeting.
- **The commission’s staff should be nonpartisan, unified, and hired early in the process by the commission itself.** The timeline should specify the point early in the process when this will happen.

CRITERIA FOR MAPS

The charter should be revised to include the principles of fairness and non-partisanship to be considered in any redistricting map:

- *Ensure equal representation in keeping with the principle of “one person, one vote,” with overall variation in the population of Legislative districts not exceeding $\pm 5\%$*
- *Ensure that the voting power of minorities is not diluted, per the Voting Rights Act and the applicable case law*
- *Respect political subdivisions. In descending order of priority: towns, cities, incorporated villages and towns, and unified school districts*
- *Respect “communities of interest” to the greatest extent possible*
- *Incumbents, political candidates or political parties cannot be considered*
- *Be contiguous and compact*

TRANSPARENCY & PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Charter should be revised to specify that:

- **Meetings and hearings of the commission are public, except those**

relating only to personnel matters. Ex parte meetings of more than two commissioners should be prohibited.

- **Meetings and hearings should be held with adequate public notice, be held both in the day and evening, and include interpretation services to ensure maximum public participation.** Meetings and hearings of the commission should be announced publicly, including online, at least 72 hours in advance.
- **All materials, notes, and supporting data should be made publicly available within a specified time.** Any data being used by the commission in its deliberations, all United States Census data, and any proposed maps, together with all of their supporting data (from the United States Census and other sources) should be available online within 72 hours of its creation or receipt, and in a format which can be manipulated using generally available computer programs.
- **A specified number and geographic distribution of public meetings should be required.** In order to receive input from voters on the shape of their community and the appropriateness of judgment calls related to district lines, the charter should specify, for example, a public hearing in each town and city, with allowance for the incorporation of new county jurisdictions in the future.
- **The timeline should specify a date by which hearings will begin.**
- **Hearings should offer simultaneous interpretation for limited-English proficient residents and venues should be handicapped accessible.**

CONCLUSION

The redistricting process in Nassau County is broken, but not beyond repair.

The experience of counties around New York State and in jurisdictions across the country confirms that the Nassau County Charter offers a strong foundation for reform. The consensus of the courts, elected officials from both parties, and 81% of Nassau voters confirms that action must be taken.

The Nassau United Redistricting Coalition has prepared this report in order to educate members of the public and the County Legislature as to the alternatives to Nassau's broken redistricting process which are available. We look forward to discussions with the public and members of the County Legislature about models of fair, non-partisan redistricting which are working around the country today and how they might be adopted for Nassau county.

We have the opportunity make our county a national model of good government. Reforms to ensure the non-partisanship and independence of the process, effective functioning of the commission, and meaningful public participation at every step will make Nassau County an exemplar of redistricting that puts voters over political interests.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

Citizens can and should make their voice heard. Your legislators should know how important a fair redistricting process is to you, and that it should be a high priority for action. In a recent poll, conducted by the Long Island Civic Engagement Table, 81% of those surveyed said they supported a non-partisan, citizen-led redistricting process. If you are one of them, you should let your Legislator know.

Community organizations should also be in touch with their legislators. They may become allies of the Nassau United Redistricting Coalition, to ensure that they receive updates about the campaign for fair redistricting, and have the chance to participate.

Legislators should study and understand the experience of the jurisdictions studied in this report, and the recommendations being made. They should engage in serious conversation with the community, and prepare to take action.

All of us have a responsibility to make sure that everyone's voice is heard. That, after all, is the great hope of democracy. It should be the goal of our redistricting process, too.

Notes

1. The full United States Census is taken once every 10 years, at the beginning of a new decade. The results of the census are typically released in March of the following year. For elections taking place in even-numbered years, new districts are usually put into place for the year ending in “2” (for example, 1992, 2002, 2012). For elections taking place in odd-numbered years, some localities redistrict quickly after the release of census data in time for the election of the year ending in “1,” and other localities redistrict for the election of the year ending in “3.”
2. Jonathan Walter. “Dems Prevail in Redistricting Ruling.” *The South Shore Standard*. July 22, 2011. <http://bit.ly/voterfirst2>
3. Karen Rubin. “Redistricting hearings underway in Nassau County; public can impact voting map.” *Examiner.com*. September 21, 2012. <http://bit.ly/votersfirst3>
4. Detailed analysis and comparison of the legislature’s plan, the Democratic TDAC plan, and the coalition Plan, can be found at the coalition’s website, www.nassauunitedredistricting.org/2013/01/29/comparing-the-nassau-united-redistricting-coalition-plan-with-plans-proposed-by-the-temporary-districting-advisory-commission/
5. Andrew Hackmack. “Republican redistricting plan advances.” *Long Beach Herald*. February 13, 2013. <http://bit.ly/votersfirst5>
6. Nassau County 2013 election results can be viewed at <http://www.nassaucountyny.gov/agencies/boe/results.html>. In 2013, only the new District 11 produced a competitive general election contest within 10 percent final margin of victory. In 2009 and 2011, under the old districts, there were four and five such competitive elections.
7. http://www.theislandnow.com/williston_park/news/article_4da5b356-5b50-11e2-9a7f-001a4bcf887a.html
8. League of Women Voters of Westchester. “Statement on County Redistricting, May 9, 2011.” <http://watpa.org/lwv/RedistrictingItems/>
9. Westchester County Executive Robert P. Astorino. “Astorino Vetoes ‘Flawed’ Redistricting Plan.” May 19, 2011. <http://www3.westchestergov.com/news/4014-astorino-vetoes-qflawedq-redistricting-plan>
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Appendix

- ➔ A separate appendix document – including a glossary of redistricting terms, survey results and methodology from the Long Island Civic Engagement Table’s poll of registered Nassau voters, and comprehensive data on redistricting processes across New York State – is available on our website at [**www.nassauunitedredistricting.org**](http://www.nassauunitedredistricting.org)