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The Honorable Michael J. Moran, House Assistant Majority Leader
Co-Chair, Joint Committee on Redistricting

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Dear Leader Moran and Members of the Joint Committee on Redistricting,

Thank you for your extraordinary work in producing the draft legislative maps that were published last week, and congratulations to you and to all of the members of the Joint Committee on Redistricting for the steps you are taking to enhance opportunities for diverse political representation and empowerment of communities of color across the Commonwealth.

When the redistricting process began, I had two main goals — first, to support the statewide effort to maximize representation for communities of color through the creation of more majority minority opportunity districts — and second, to keep the 26th Middlesex District geographically coherent for the people of Cambridge and Somerville while honoring our own shared communities of interest.

From our many conversations and from the public hearings, I know how complex and challenging this process has been. And yet, I am pleased to see the draft maps produced for new House districts do an excellent job overall of addressing my two primary goals. It's remarkable that the House is proposing to create 33 majority minority opportunity districts — a substantial increase that exceeds even what the civil rights leaders and progressive organizers in the Drawing Democracy coalition had been calling on us to do. This effort can help to undo systemic injustices of the past and is credit to your leadership and the work of the Committee.

Furthermore, I am pleased that you have been able to generally preserve the geographic coherency of the 26th Middlesex. Despite the fact that our district grew at a rapid pace and is now over the statutory limit for population, and despite the fact that our district borders the 2nd Suffolk which has been the subject of many calls for the creation of a new, incumbent-free majority-minority opportunity district in Chelsea, you have nevertheless proposed a new map that retains all of the key sections of the 26th Middlesex — from East Somerville, Assembly Row, the Inner Belt, and parts of Union Square in Somerville, to East Cambridge, Wellington-Harrington, Inman Square, the Port, Central Square, and parts of Kendall Square in Cambridge. In addition, the proposed maps will add Cambridgeport/Ward 5 to the 26th Middlesex, which increases the

general geographical coherency of the eastern portions of Cambridge and reflects testimony heard during the committee process.

That said, my biggest concern with the current draft map is how it splits up the East Cambridge neighborhood. Therefore, I am respectfully asking the Committee to make some adjustments to the proposed House district lines in East Cambridge to further bolster geographical consistency and to keep our communities of interest intact.

The current draft proposal has Cambridge's existing Ward 1, Precinct 1 migrating from the 26th Middlesex to the 2nd Suffolk. While I understand the larger factors that are driving this change, including uneven population growth in Cambridge and the desire to create a new, majority Hispanic district in neighboring Chelsea, I know we can find a better way to satisfy our overall goals without completely splitting up the "grid" network of streets that has traditionally helped to define the geography of the East Cambridge neighborhood.

Therefore, I respectfully ask the committee to use census blocks to keep the heart of the East Cambridge neighborhood together in the 26th Middlesex. This could be accomplished by exchanging some of the Ward 1, Precinct 1 census blocks within the core of the East Cambridge neighborhood (consisting mainly of triple-deckers and other very densely packed, low-rise residential dwellings along with local retail, historic sites, and civic spaces, from the vicinity of First or Second Street running west up toward the Grand Junction Railroad track) for some of the census blocks that are within the current draft of the 26th Middlesex but are dominated by much larger residential and commercial buildings that are marketed and oriented more toward Kendall Square.

My hope would be to keep the streets that make up the historic East Cambridge street grid intact, which in turn would ensure that communities of interest within the 26th Middlesex are less divided. It would also add to the coherence to the new 2nd Suffolk, as Cambridge's Ward 1 could actually be described as containing three distinct sections — a Cambridge Crossing section, an East Cambridge neighborhood section, and a Kendall Square section. The 2nd Suffolk is already adding numerous large residential buildings in the vicinity of Kendall Square and Cambridge Crossing, so this observation is what leads me to conclude some changes could be made from a consistency standpoint.

This proposal will help to keep communities of interest in the 26th Middlesex more intact. For at least the past three decades, the legislature's Redistricting Committee has kept East Cambridge connected to East Somerville, Union Square, Wellington-Harrington, and The Port. **This legislative district has reflected a community of interest defined by a number of prominent immigrant communities, working class residents and working families, public housing tenants, renters, creative types, and graduate students.**

East Cambridge and East Somerville in particular share special traditions such as the Feast of Saints Cosmas and Damien, which links Italian immigrants who settled in Cambridge and Somerville over the past century. The Feast includes a parade that travels through East Cambridge, and parts of Union Square, East Somerville, and Wellington-Harrington — all core parts of the 26th Middlesex.

Our district is also home to the headquarters of the Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers (MAPS). It's an apt location given the strong communities of Brazilian, Portuguese, and other immigrants who have made their homes in the East Cambridge, Wellington-Harrington, Union Square, and East Somerville areas for many generations. As a matter of fact, MAPS was established in 1993 by a merger of the former

Cambridge Organization of Portuguese Americans and the former Somerville Portuguese American League — further demonstration of the strong ties that run across city lines and directly through today's 26th Middlesex.

Other social service organizations are similarly based in our district with a mission that spans both Cambridge and Somerville, such as Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services, which is located in the East Cambridge part of our district. In addition, there's also Somerville-Cambridge Elder Services, which is based in the Somerville part of our district.

Furthermore, our district is linked by shared history, shared challenges, and shared opportunities. Our district boasts large numbers of public housing tenants and an abundance of renters — and as a product of public housing and as a longtime renter myself — it is with pride that I note some of our nation's very first public housing projects were developed right here in The Port section of our district, at Newtowne Court and Washington Elms, around the time of the Great Depression. Today, our district features some of the biggest concentrations of public housing tenants and renters that you'll find anywhere. We've also been at the forefront of tenant organizing and housing justice efforts and community development work going back decades.

The Inner Belt section of Somerville, which is part of our district, derives its name from the infamous urban ring highway project that was proposed to smash right through Cambridgeport, Central Square, Wellington-Harrington, Union Square, and East Somerville. Our community rose up with others to defeat this proposal and change the course of history. More recently, our community has stood up time and again to fight for the construction of the Green Line Extension and Community Path Extension projects, another example of the strong links between East Cambridge and East Somerville that are reflected in the shape of the 26th Middlesex. Looking forward, we are diligently working to support the Grand Junction Path and connect it to the Somerville Community Path. And as Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley noted in her testimony to the Redistricting Committee earlier this year, the McGrath Highway and I-93 represent serious environmental justice and transit equity concerns in our community. The fact that the 26th Middlesex connects East Cambridge to the rest of Cambridge and Somerville has allowed me to play a key role in making progress on these issues — and it speaks to the benefit of keeping East Cambridge more connected to the rest of our district going forward.

In closing, I do fear that the current proposal divides East Cambridge in a way that diminishes our communities of interest — and to be sure, virtually all of the feedback I've received on the proposed maps so far has lamented the fact that East Cambridge seems to be at risk of being split up in a less than coherent way. When one looks at the larger outline of the proposed map for the 26th Middlesex that was published last week, the gap that I am seeking to address with this suggestion stands out. Overall, this suggestion will make the map look generally smoother in the vicinity of East Cambridge.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns. I would be more than happy to answer any questions you or the Committee may have or to furnish the Committee with additional information. And thank you, once again, for your good work.

Yours in service,



Rep. Mike Connolly