



THE CAMPAIGN FOR FAIR & INDEPENDENT REDISTRICTING

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ReShapeNY - A STATEWIDE CAMPAIGN for REDISTRICTING REFORM IS LAUNCHED

*Nine Distinguished New Yorkers Lead Call for Change Including
Harry Wilson, Dr. Calvin O. Butts III, John Avlon, Gerry Benjamin, Grace Lyu-Volkhausen and
Lillian Rodríguez López, and Former Elected Officials from Both Parties - Robert Abrams, Ed
Koch and Frank Padavan*

Thirty Organizations Spanning State Form Broad-Based Coalition

Bipartisan Group of State Legislators Attend Conference to Show Support for Campaign

Newly Unveiled Data Charting Expressions of Support for Reform
Shows Overwhelming Backing by the Legislature

ReShapeNY, a campaign to achieve redistricting reform organized by Citizens Union, was launched today in a simultaneous announcement in Albany and New York City by its distinguished co-chairs and diverse coalition of thirty member organizations. ReShapeNY co-chairs and participating groups called for the end to partisan gerrymandering, proposing an independent, impartial and politically balanced citizens redistricting commission to draw fair district boundaries through a process that allows for ample public input. The commission would be required to use even-handed and sensible redistricting guidelines and criteria that provide for fair and effective representation of all New Yorkers, including racial and language minority groups.

In joining as ReShapeNY campaign co-chairs, Former Attorney General Bob Abrams, former New York City Mayor Ed Koch, Pastor of the Abyssinian Baptist Church and President of SUNY College at Old Westbury Dr. Calvin O. Butts, III, the 2010 Republican state comptroller nominee Harry Wilson, former Republican State Senator Frank Padavan, The Daily Beast and CNN contributor John Avlon, Associate Vice President for Regional Engagement at SUNY New Paltz Gerald Benjamin, longtime Asian-American advocate Grace Lyu-Volkhausen, and Hispanic Federation President Lillian Rodríguez López either attended the news conferences or issued statements to make the case for independent redistricting reform.

The ReShapeNY coalition also unveiled new data showing overwhelming majority support for change to the current partisan gerrymandering of district boundaries. One hundred twenty-one (121) of the 150 members of the Assembly and 60 of 62 members of the State Senate have expressed support for an independent redistricting process through co-sponsorship of a reform bill, vote in a committee for a reform bill, or a pledge or commitment of support to good government groups or former Mayor Ed Koch's organization, New York Uprising.

In the Assembly, the greatest expression of support by legislators is through co-sponsorship of Governor Andrew Cuomo's program bill (A. 5388). Seventy-four members of the Assembly have signed on to the recently introduced bill. In the State Senate, the Cuomo bill (S. 3419) was introduced into the Rules committee without a legislator as a sponsor, thereby preventing legislators from co-sponsoring the bill although over twenty legislators have expressed a desire to do so.

However, 21 senators have signed onto the bill introduced by long-time redistricting reform leader in the legislature, State Senator Michael Gianaris. Sixteen senators have also signed onto the other independent redistricting bill carried by State Senator David Valesky.

Showing how few legislators have not yet signaled support for independent redistricting reform in time for the 2012 elections, the groups also presented data that showed only 2 in the State Senate and 29 in the State Assembly have not expressed some form of support for passage of independent redistricting legislation in time for the 2012 elections.

"For far too long, redistricting has been conducted in a partisan manner that has prioritized the re-election of the party in power and individual incumbent legislators to the detriment of public policy needs. We must end the political manipulation for partisan advantage that exists when self-interested lawmakers draw the maps of the districts they represent," said former Attorney General and Citizens Union board member Robert Abrams. "We support a new approach that no longer allows legislators to draw their own district lines effectively choosing the voters before the voters choose them."

Fellow co-chair and former NYC Mayor Ed Koch, the founder of NY Uprising, stated, "Redistricting is one of the three key reforms necessary for restoring our dysfunctional state government. Since I founded New York Uprising to highlight the need for meaningful redistricting reform, 138 sitting legislators signed pledges committing to support it. I am pleased to be joining with ReShapeNY which will help hold these legislators accountable for the election-year promises they made to their constituents. Together we will work to ensure that redistricting is fair and independent because the future of our state depends on it. I believe we are on the cusp of victory."

"I am happy to join this campaign as a co-chair because I strongly support drawing district lines by an independent commission using fair criteria in an open, transparent process. New York State needs to create an impartial process that is fair to all and protects the voting rights of affected communities. Too often in the past gerrymandering resulted in division of communities and diminution of voices of certain communities," remarked Dr. Calvin O. Butts, III, President of SUNY College at Old Westbury and Pastor of the historic Abyssinian Baptist Church in the City of New York. "Reform of the state's redistricting process is long overdue. I call on all legislators to remove the conflict of interest they have in this process and make sure change happens in time for the 2012 elections."

"The historical system of political gerrymandering protects incumbents, reduces competition and thus stymies the marketplace of ideas," explained 2010 Republican state comptroller nominee Harry Wilson. "We

need to create a system that is truly nonpartisan and set up to foster competitive elections so we can attract better candidates and better ideas into public life.”

“ReShapeNY is an important campaign to continue to generate momentum to ensure redistricting reform is realized,” noted former Republican State Senator Frank Padavan. “As a co-sponsor of the bill in 2010 to create an independent redistricting commission with fair and defined criteria and opportunities for public engagement in the map-making process, I urge my former colleagues to move forward on this long overdue reform. The general public, and ultimately both Republicans and Democrats, will benefit from a process that puts fairness and independence above partisan concerns in the drawing of district lines.”

Supporting the co-chairs were leaders of the ReShapeNY coalition – Citizens Union, the League of Women Voters, New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG) – backed by ReShapeNY steering committee members the Association for a Better New York (ABNY), Bedford Mosholu Community Association, Common Cause/NY, Citizen Action of New York, Citizens Committee for NYC, Citizens for a Better New York, National Organization for Women (NOW) NYC, Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), New York Uprising, NYC Central Labor Council, Public Employees Federation, Regional Plan Association, Queens Civic Congress, Reinvent Albany, and the Women’s City Club of New York (WCC).

“Partisan redistricting has been a longstanding obstacle to the practice of good government in New York State for decades,” said Gerald Benjamin, the Associate Vice President for Regional Engagement at SUNY New Paltz. “Both the Assembly and State Senate have worked in concert to create district boundaries that preserve the status quo power structure while too often weakening the connection between communities and neighborhoods. Reform is needed to establish defined criteria for delineating districts that respects the integrity of natural and longstanding borders and allow for the public to meaningfully participate in drawing district maps.”

Daily Beast columnist and CNN contributor John Avlon added, “The rigged system of partisan redistricting is a major cause of our inability to address New York State’s entrenched problems. The vast majority of citizens want legislators to work together rather than engage in hyper-partisan fights. By drawing ‘safe districts,’ politicians discourage competitive general elections. As a result, our politics becomes more polarized, resulting in fewer bipartisan solutions. An independent redistricting commission drawing district boundaries using concrete and reasonable criteria is fundamental to realizing a more effective government that works across party lines. It is a reform that can help achieve many others.”

Hispanic Federation President Lillian Rodríguez López remarked, “the current process of redistricting must be improved to adequately take into account all communities when district lines are formed. Reshape will work to ensure a transparent and equitable process particularly for the Latino community. A more independent commission can take into account the diverse interests of the public when creating district lines.”

Longtime Asian-American advocate Grace Lyu-Volckhausen commented, “Partisan gerrymandering to maintain the party in power in the respective houses of the New York State legislature has resulted in the marginalization of emerging ethnic minority groups like Korean-Americans. Asian-Americans do not have representation in the state legislature that reflects their proportion of the state’s population. This is why it is critical for the public to be able to provide input at hearings and through online technology before draft maps are drawn and provide additional feedback that is taken into account after draft district boundaries are known.”

In addition to the 18 groups making up the leadership of ReShapeNY, 12 other organizations have endorsed the campaign for redistricting reform, including the Citizens Budget Commission, Council of School Supervisors and Administrators (CSA), Council of Peoples Organization, Cultural Collaborative Jamaica, Drum Major Institute, Environmental Advocates, Housing Works, Korean American Voters' Council, Long Island Progressive Coalition, Mental Health Association in NYS, Metropolitan Russian-American Parents Association, and Transportation Alternatives.

Organizations interested in joining the ReShapeNY coalition can contact Campaign Director Alex Camarda at 212-227-0342 ext. 24 or by email at acamarda@citizensunion.org or Campaign Manager Rachael Fauss at 212-227-0342 ext. 10 or by email at rfauss@citizensunion.org. For more information about ReShapeNY or redistricting, visit our website at www.reshapeny.org.

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