



# 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

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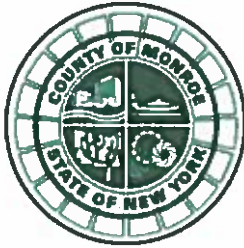
Dear Mr. Grant:

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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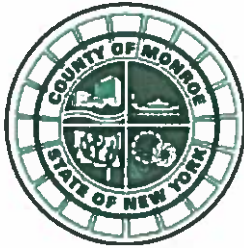
The Commission never discussed the public's input in subsequent meetings. During these meetings, there was no public deliberation by the Commission. Its meetings were called on short notice, with one meeting called with so little notice that a quorum was not present. Instead of engaging in a transparent 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."

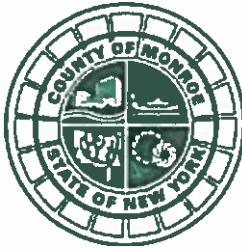
Although some Legislators raised this legal flaw, the Legislature's Republican-led supermajority ignored them and voted to adopt the Local Law. Not only did they ignore procedural concerns, they also voted to cut off debate, stifling discussion of the substance of the redistricting proposal. This left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



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**Adam J. Bello**  
*County Executive*

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Adam Bello", is written over the word "Sincerely,".

**Adam J. Bello**  
Monroe County Executive

Enc.

