

July 30, 2021

Joint Committee on Redistricting
24 Beacon St.
Room 319
Boston, MA 02133

RE: New Bedford Congressional Redistricting

Dear Committee Members:

We are a group of twenty-two business and non-profit leaders from across Southeastern Massachusetts, and we write to urge the Joint Committee on Redistricting to undo decades of unfairness by amending the boundaries of the Ninth Congressional District to establish a unified Southeastern Massachusetts district that is untethered to Greater Boston.

For more than a century, the cities of New Bedford and Fall River — located only 15 miles apart and together home to 180,000 people of similar racial, economic and cultural background (including the nation's largest Portuguese communities), have been in either separate Congressional districts or lumped together in a district that extends all the way to the affluent Boston suburbs, which have dominated the district politically.

The current district configuration resulting from the 2010 census is the worst in a century.

It splits Fall River — the state's 10th largest city and among its poorest — in two. The city's North End has been shoehorned into the gerrymandered Fourth Congressional District that runs nearly fifty miles to the Boston border and includes the wealthy and politically powerful suburban towns of Brookline, Newton and Wellesley, where median home prices exceed \$1 million and household incomes are four or five times greater than they are in Fall River and New Bedford. Fall River's South End, meanwhile, forms the westernmost end of the Ninth Congressional District, which extends nearly fifty miles east to Provincetown. The result is that the political voice and influence of Fall River has been diluted within two congressional districts dominated by wealthy suburban Boston communities and Cape Cod resort towns.

Meanwhile, New Bedford, the seventh largest city in Massachusetts and home to significant low-income Black and Latino populations, is included in a gerrymandered district that encompasses wealthy resort communities on Cape Cod, as well as powerful suburban South Shore residential towns with which the city has little in common. It is no accident that no New Bedford resident has been elected to Congress in 100 years.

The U.S. Supreme Court, citing the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, has ruled that drawing congressional district lines that effectively marginalize citizens on the basis of race is discriminatory and illegal. Six percent of Fall River's residents are Black and 10.5 percent are Latino, while 7 percent of New Bedford's population is Black and over 20 percent

Hispanic. Despite having the largest populations of color in both the Fourth and Ninth Congressional Districts, those populations have not been afforded a common voice to advance their purposes.

Splitting up the minority populations into two districts raises serious questions about racial equity. Those minority populations have been historically under-represented politically and have suffered disproportionately from lower income levels, health problems, crime and lower educational attainment than the affluent and powerful communities that dominate the Fourth and Ninth Congressional districts. It is fair to say that is directly the result of Fall River's and New Bedford's inability to force those issues to the top of the two districts' legislative agendas.

Fall River and New Bedford would be best served by their inclusion in a single congressional district that would allow them to speak with a single voice on behalf of their common interests: raising educational performance to generate economic growth, addressing environmental concerns that disproportionately affect minority populations, and maximizing the use of their seaports and manufacturing sectors.

New Bedford for two decades has been the highest-grossing fishing port in the United States, and the port generates \$11.1 billion in economic activity for Massachusetts, approximately 2% of all the Commonwealth's economic activity. Further, the two cities will be the epicenter of a new multi-billion dollar American offshore wind industry, which will spearhead the transformation of the United States to renewable green energy that will help in the fight against climate change and rising sea levels while enabling Massachusetts to reach its goals of reaching net zero carbon emissions by mid-century.

The unfairness inherent in the gerrymandering of these two congressional districts to mute the political voice of minority populations is of long standing and must be undone by the Joint Committee on Redistricting if Southeastern Massachusetts, long shortchanged in the economic growth of Massachusetts, is to be more than a second-class region within the Commonwealth. The state's other leading regional centers — Boston, Worcester, Springfield and Lowell — all have consistently been represented by residents of their cities and have been well-served as a result. It should be no different for Fall River and New Bedford.

The argument that municipalities get twice the representation if they are split is a canard that has been used to justify the gerrymander for generations. The reality is that focused political commitments matter. The idea that split representation is advantageous has consistently been knocked down by the Supreme Court in cases involving gerrymandering that has a racially disparate effect. And it doesn't comport with common sense.

What would be fairer would be a Ninth Congressional District that encompasses the New Bedford and Fall River areas in their entirety. We propose shifting the boundary of the Ninth Congressional District west to the Rhode Island border, moving all of Fall River, along with the New Bedford/Fall River suburbs of Freetown and West Freetown, Somerset and Swansea into the Ninth. Doing so would unite the entire Interstate 195 corridor into a congressional district that recognizes the region's common economic, cultural and political interests and undo an historic wrong that has

hindered the growth of the region and prevented its citizens of all races and economic classes from sharing in the prosperity that has blessed the rest of Massachusetts.

We urge the Joint Committee on Redistricting to remedy the situation in establishing the boundaries of a new district that will treat southeastern Massachusetts and two of its largest and most economically significant cities as a single political entity that will be able to elect its own representatives in the U.S. Congress during the critical decades ahead of us.

Sincerely,

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New Bedford Economic Development Council

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Sylvia Group

David Slutz
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Potentia Manufacturing Group
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