

Southeast Regional Hearing

Written Testimony Received 10/18/21

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Comments: House State Government Committee Remarks on Congressional Mapping & Redistricting in the Southeast

October 15, 2021

Chair Grove, Chair Conklin and rest of the committee,

I am a resident of Honey Brook Borough, in Chester County. The congressional map created by an outside-the-state consultant as a result of the 2016 lawsuit was better than what came before but it still is not the map the citizens of PA deserve. The more I learned about how the 2011-12 maps were decided made me convinced the public needs to weigh in on this process before final decisions are made. I believe that was always the expectation; it just did not happen in 2011-12, nor again in 2016-18. It is happening now. Bravo to you!

Regarding PA's Congressional Map, you could do worse than starting from the Draw The Lines PA crowd-sourced map which manages to take into account much of what regional testifiers have asked for with regard to economic, historical, cultural ties among counties. They started from a blank map, and you should also. Below are my recommendations.

1. Losing a seat as a result of population loss and slowing population gain means population realignments should be taken into account. Start from a blank map in order to preserve the rationality of the process. Keep populations strictly equal, so as not to run afoul of equal representation requirements. Seek to preserve county boundaries and other political divisions if possible, particularly precinct and township, municipal or borough lines. Follow the constitutional requirements of contiguity and compactness.
2. Consider communities of interest, particularly racial or language minorities and colleges and universities, of which we have many.
3. Count prisoners in their pre-incarceration residence, following the legal example of the PA Legislative Reapportionment Commission. This question of fairness matters to the public. Changes to the count will have little effect on congressional district boundaries or on funding but would increase public perceptions of fairness in the process and would align with numbers used for state legislative seats.

With regards to specific asks for Chester & nearby counties:

1. Please note that Coatesville and South Coatesville are a community of interest and should not be split unless absolutely necessary. They share schools, churches, businesses, culture and history and would likely thrive better if kept together as part of a single congressional district. This is something the Draw The Lines PA map did not accurately assess, in my opinion.

2. Pottstown is in Montgomery County, but the state legislative maps cut it up. I notice the Draw The Lines PA Congressional Citizen Map lumps it with Reading in Berks and Chester County to the south. It is a struggling city that needs all the strength it can gather from being whole, preferably as part of its own county. It should be protected and not lumped with other counties which may lessen its influence.

3. No one wants their county divided, but if it were necessary, Honey Brook Township and Borough borders Lancaster County and have religious, family, and business ties in Lancaster County, Honey Brook Borough is even tagged by Google as Gap, PA, a town in Lancaster County, due to historic ties. The ties of Chester County with Berks are less clear.