

Testimony

Good Morning, and thank you Chairman Folmer and Chairman Williams for holding this hearing.

I want to make some comments on my Independent Citizens Commission legislation SB 22. A bill that I have introduced for a few sessions now. A bill that shares bipartisan support in the Senate.

My interest in redistricting started immediately after my first time through the process. It was evident to me that the process failed the voters.

Redistricting is not an issue that I just pay lip service too. I've personally gone on the record as a testifier against the negative impacts of gerrymandering. I've joined court challenges. In 2012, I testified before the Legislative Reapportionment Commission (LRC) because 50% of constituents of the 18th Senatorial District were being cast off to different districts. In 2000, the County seat of Northampton was removed from my district.

When it comes to redistricting, the power of the pen is irrefutable. As they say, a picture says a thousand words. Too often it seems, compactness, contiguity and communities of interest take a back seat to what may be in an elected officials best interest.

In 2001, when I realized that the process had flaws, I could not anticipate how access to data would change over the ensuing years. However, the recent challenge to our most recent maps laid bare the flaws in our current process. It also showed that our voters have had enough with the manner in which we draw our maps. A politician commission is no longer acceptable.

We should fix this process for all time. We should take it upon ourselves to take the politicians out of the process and insert an independent, disinterested, multi-partisan commission of individuals to lead our redrawing efforts. This is not a reflection on the people whom draw the maps. Rather it is an acknowledgement that for our democracy to truly thrive we need to recognize that access to data makes it too easy to manipulate maps for selfish interests.

As a result people have lost faith in the fairness of our elections and this needs to change. Fair elections are the bedrock of our democracy. People need to believe that the system is open and seeks to serve their best interests.

Last session, I engaged my colleagues from all four caucuses in a working group on this issue. We developed what is now SB 22. Today, it has 21 co-sponsors. There is a companion bill in the House (HB722) that has bi-partisan support and has over 100 co-sponsors.

We looked at certain states have done to improve the manner in which their district maps are drawn. California's model became the goal. Today, we actually have members of California's Independent Commission in the audience. Gil Ontai (On- tA), Stanley Forbes and Jeanne Raya were kind enough to travel to Pennsylvania and share their insights and redistricting in California. They told me yesterday that the approval rating of the California State Legislature improved from 10% to 50% after using the Independent Commission to draw the lines.

This has never been a partisan issue to me, but a people one. And I would be remiss if I did not mention that part of the reason the support of this legislation has grown is the people. They have voiced their concern about the process. But we do not have a lot of time to act to fix it. In some states, it was a people referendum that drove the change. We don't have that luxury in Pennsylvania. It is up to us. We need to act. We need to step up and re-sure the foundation of our democracy, our elections.

I'm hopeful that this legislature is finally acknowledging that we need a better process. The time is right.

It is my hope that as a result of this hearing, we begin to restore the true representative nature of democracy and government as it was meant to be.

We must work on a process that lives up to our current Constitutional standards of contiguousness, compactness, and respect for Pennsylvania's existing boundaries and counties.

And that was always my focus and the goal of SB 22.

I do not want to belabor the conversation on SB22 as part of my testimony. I note that Fair Districts is listed as a testifier later today and I know they will get into the details of the legislation with you.