



A LEGISLATIVE AGENCY OF THE PENNSYLVANIA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Testimony of Dr. Kyle C. Kopko Director, Center for Rural Pennsylvania

Good morning Senator Argall, Senator Street, and members of the Senate State Government Committee. My name is Dr. Kyle C. Kopko, and I serve as the Director of the Center for Rural Pennsylvania. Thank you for the opportunity to speak before the Committee today.

As you know, the Center is a bipartisan, bicameral legislative research agency of the General Assembly. As such, we have no input into how legislative and congressional boundaries are drawn. However, we understand the concerns of all Pennsylvanians that the boundaries be drawn fairly so that the voice of each resident can be heard equally.

To begin, I am testifying in somewhat of a data vacuum. As the Committee is aware, the detailed results of the 2020 Census will not be available until later this year. However, there are other datasets from which the Center can draw inferences regarding population and demographic changes.

As part of our mandated responsibilities, the Center maintains a database of rural and urban demographic trends stretching back more than 30 years. Today I will be using the information from this database to highlight three demographic trends that I believe will have the most significant effects on the future of Pennsylvania, and, more specifically, rural Pennsylvania:

1. What we call the “Bifurcation of Pennsylvania”;
2. The inability of the population to grow naturally—instead relying on in-migration; and
3. Changing demographic characteristics of rural Pennsylvanians.

From the outset, it is important to note that these trends are not the result of the COVID-19 pandemic or the policies of a particular administration. Rather these trends have been occurring over the last 30 years, if not longer. As such, changing these trends will require more than just a few “quick-fixes” or minor changes to public policy.

Before addressing the substance of these data trends, it is important to discuss several methodological details: the data below are primarily from the U.S. Census Bureau. In particular, they are from the 2010 and 2019, 5-year Averages, from the American Community Survey, and various decennial censuses. Also, most of our analysis occurs at the county level. The Center for Rural Pennsylvania defines a county as rural when the number of persons per square mile is below the average statewide population density (284 persons per square mile, as of the 2010 Census). All other counties are considered urban.

Population Bifurcation

In terms of demographic changes, Pennsylvania can be divided into two regions: the southeast and the rest of the state.

Generally speaking, we are including counties that are east of Interstate 81 from Franklin to Lebanon counties and south of Interstate 78 from Berks to Northampton counties as the southeast region. All counties south and east of these two major transportation corridors have seen significant population increases, while counties west and north of this line have seen population declines, with some exceptions. From 1980 to 2019, the southeast corner of the state has experienced a 22 percent increase in population, while the rest of the state has seen a 6 percent decline.

This population shift also mirrors an economic shift. Per capita household income in the southeast has increased, and it has increased at a faster rate than the rest of the state. Af-

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ter adjusting for inflation, in 1980, per capita income in the southeast was \$33,085, and by 2019, it was \$63,111, an increase of more than \$30,000 or 91 percent. In comparison, the per capita income in the rest of the state went from \$29,194 in 1980 to \$51,497 in 2019, an increase of about \$22,300 or 76 percent. In addition, the unemployment rate in the southeast has been 1 percentage point lower than the rest of the state.

Many rural counties have seen population stagnation and decline in recent years. Specifically, from 2010 to 2019, 40 of Pennsylvania's 48 rural counties have seen their populations decrease.

Rural Pennsylvania, however, was not alone in this trend. Across the United States, two out of every three rural counties lost population during the last decade. This trend was especially prevalent among rural counties in the Pennsylvania border states of Ohio, New York, Maryland, and West Virginia.

Inability to Grow Naturally—Dependence on In-Migration

It is unlikely that Pennsylvania's rural population will grow naturally. Since 2000, rural counties have had more deaths than births. According to 2019 data from the Pennsylvania Department of Health, 42 of Pennsylvania's 48 rural counties had more deaths than births compared to eight of Pennsylvania's 19 urban counties.

This trend is unlikely to change for two reasons:

1. Declining birth rate. Since 2000, the number of rural births has declined 14 percent. Another way to understand this downward trend is to examine the total fertility rate, or the average number of births per woman over her lifetime. In 2000, the average was 1.75 births per woman. By 2019, the rate was 1.65. For population replacement, a rate of 2.10 is required.

2. Pennsylvania has a large number of Baby Boomers (3.06 million, born 1946 to 1964). The oldest in this generation are now 75 years old and the youngest are 57. As this generation continues to age and pass away, their numbers will affect death rates for at least 20 more years.

The inability to grow naturally means that population growth in rural Pennsylvania will largely be driven by in-migration.

Changing Characteristics of Rural and Urban Pennsylvanians

Pennsylvania's overall population is becoming older and more diverse.

In 2019, 20 percent of rural residents were 65 years old and older. Among urban residents, the percentage was slightly lower at 17 percent.

In 2019, 25 of Pennsylvania's 67 counties had more senior citizens (65 years old and older) than youth (under 20 years old). As mentioned earlier, this trend will likely continue as more Baby Boomers turn 65 years old.

The aging of our population will likely have profound effects on educational institutions and employers. There will likely be fewer students enrolled in schools and fewer employees in the workforce.

From 2000 to 2019, the minority population in Pennsylvania (non-white, including those who identify as Hispanic/Latino) increased 54 percent. This dramatic increase has occurred throughout the state, especially in rural counties, where the number of minority residents increased 88 percent.

These rapid changes will likely continue into the near future, meaning that Pennsylvania is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse and beginning to look much more like the rest of the United States.

What do all these statistics mean for redistricting?

1. Legislative and congressional districts in the rural and western parts of Pennsylvania will likely become geographically larger.
2. Legislators will likely be challenged to balance the interests and concerns of southeastern Pennsylvania with those of the rest of the state.
3. Similarly, our representatives may be challenged with balancing the needs of an aging population along with those of younger adults and families.

Thank you again for this opportunity to discuss demographic changes in Pennsylvania. I hope this information is helpful. I am happy to answer your questions.