

Testimony Regarding Congressional Reapportionment  
Before the Pennsylvania State Senate Committee on State Government  
August 4, 2021

My name is Sanford L. Hartman. I live at 1950 Meadow Lane, Wyomissing, Pennsylvania (Sixth Congressional District). I submit this testimony today to express my strong belief that if Congressional boundaries are drawn to reflect “cracking and packing,” to protect the incumbent, to increase the likelihood that one party always prevails in an election, or to dilute the votes of any citizen, those drawing the the boundaries will have abdicated their responsibilities by harming our democracy and, ultimately, harming every Pennsylvania resident.

I never thought about the health of our democracy, assuming that it was the strongest in the world and that other countries calling themselves “democratic” would emulate us. I also took it for granted that for the most talented people in the world, the United States was and would always be thought of as the best place to live. I now understand that I wrong: the American experiment has come to be viewed with a sadness reflecting the loss of a good friend.

So what happened to make me feel this way? My wife is a Portuguese citizen. She was born and has lived in Portugal her entire life. She and many of her friends and colleagues lived through and in some cases participated in Portugal’s transition from a dictatorship to a democracay. Because of the pandemic, I was in the United States during our last Presidential election. I frequently communicated with my friends and relatives in Portugal, many of whom were curious about how our democracy really worked. I was able to provide them explanations of how we elect Presidents, Governors and Legislators at a level of detail they normally do not see. Their reactions were not what I expected.

They told me that the electoral college and the filibuster rules of the Senate seemed rather undemocratic, although they understood how both had evolved. But, when I explained the

concept of gerrymandering, they were genuinely puzzled, asking me repeatedly how the political party in power could create Congressional Districts deliberately designed to dilute the votes of every opposition voter. One of them put it this way: what kind of democracy do you Americans have if the party in power is able to create Congressional Districts so that a minority can block the wishes of a majority of voters and even “elect” by themselves the President of the United States?

I resented the question. But I realized that it was fair. I didn't have an answer. Nor did I want to debate the point. I grew up in Reading when Gene Shirk was the mayor, Mike O'Pake was our State Senator, and Gus Yatron was our Congressman. I graduated from Reading High School in 1971. I remember even today the excellent teachers and opportunities that were available to me. After I moved away, my home town and school district were chopped into little pieces and the pieces added to other districts that had little in common (old Congressional District 16). The unfortunate results were predictable.

Of course I understand that legislators in Pennsylvania are elected by Pennsylvanians and that it is natural for legislators to think only of their cadre of loyal voters who repeatedly elect them. To these legislators, I say that our national strength is based on the belief that the United States is the best place for attracting and using both human and economic capital, whether located in Paris, Pennsylvania or Paris, France, precisely because of its strong democracy. I now understand personally that there are democracies in the world stronger than ours, that for some of the best and brightest, the United States is no longer the best place for them to succeed (even if they grew up in this country) and that the future of American democracy and of our economic growth could look very different from their past. So, I ask that as you draw lines on a map, you consider whether you have made our democracy more or less healthy. Because how you answer

that question ultimately matters more to each and every one of us than whether a particular party is able to leverage the system to gain or keep a grip on power. What happened to Reading, Pennsylvania should not be allowed to happen again.

Thank you.