

Testimony for Senate State Government Committee: Congressional Maps 2021

My name is Ruth Yeiser. I live at 3 N. Ryanford Road in Lower Frederick Township—Montgomery County. Before the maps were redrawn in 2018, I was in the 8th Congressional District. After the maps were redrawn, I landed in the 4th Congressional District.

It took me a long time to figure out how to submit this testimony. I was aware that the State Senate Government Committee was holding a regional congressional map hearing for SE PA on August 4, but there was no information on the General Assembly Senate State Gov't Committee site about the agenda or on how to submit testimony. I eventually found an email address for Fred Sembach and he explained that the Chair of the SGC had chosen to use the Republican Caucus website as a home for the Hearing information. I couldn't figure out how to submit testimony from that website either and then Fred Sembach indicated that I could send this testimony to him or through Senator Argall's website contact form. First and foremost, information should be housed where ordinary Pennsylvanians will look. I am not a partisan Republican, nor am I a partisan Democrat. I am just an ordinary Pennsylvanian. As an ordinary Pennsylvanian, I looked on the Senate State Government website. I did not find a link to the live-stream or to the agenda or to any directions about how to submit testimony. As an ordinary Pennsylvanian, it would never occur to me to look at partisan web pages for information about hearings, nor would it occur to me to submit testimony to a partisan web page. I don't think a partisan entity should be responsible for collecting or curating testimony. In the spirit of transparency and in the spirit of soliciting robust public input, the information should be housed on the GA website. At the very minimum, the GA website should provide links to get viewers to where they need to be. There should also be clear directions for submitting written and/or oral testimony. It's hard to have public input if the public is left in the dark about how to provide input.

After the 2011 redistricting, Montgomery County (my county) was the poster child for gerrymandered congressional districts. The county was carved up into 5 congressional districts and not one congressional representative lived in Montgomery County. All of these congressional reps could have had the best intentions in the world, but because their districts were spread across multiple counties, no rep could focus their attention on the needs of Montgomery County. Instead of ensuring good representation, the districts had all been surgically drawn to guarantee the outcome. Partisan data was used to determine an index value for each precinct. A positive index value indicated that the precinct leaned red while a negative index value indicated that the precinct leaned blue. The index values of all the precincts in the district were added up and if the result was positive, the district leaned red. If the result was negative, the district leaned blue. If the mapmakers (or the majority party leadership) didn't like the result, the mapmakers moved the lines. We sometimes hear our reps defending gerrymandered maps by noting that the "voter has the last word." But it's really hard to vote the bums out when they are gerrymandered in. This gerrymandering for partisan and incumbent advantage was cheating and it has led to extremism on *both* sides, refusal to compromise and general dysfunction in Washington.

We all recognize that Pennsylvania is a swing state and we all recognize that there are areas in Pennsylvania that will always elect a Republican while other areas in Pennsylvania will always elect a Democrat. A good fair map would ensure that red areas have red representation, blue areas have blue representation, and, purple areas would not be prebaked to be red or blue. Purple areas should be drawn so that so that the outcome of the election would swing with the allegiances of the purple voters. These purple areas would allow Pennsylvania's congressional delegation to be responsive to the shifts in

priorities of Pennsylvania voters. Purple areas that are not pre-baked would force candidates of all parties to appeal to the voters in the middle. Because representatives from purple areas would have to answer to their “purple” voters, they would have to be purple in Washington...Such reps would force compromise, moderation, and they would counter the dysfunction that we have unfortunately come to expect.

In the next few months, you should have a bunch of preliminary maps to choose from. Choose the one that lets purple areas elect purple reps.