

**Testimony of Jean Handley
Dauphin County Resident
Senate Committee on State Government
Congressional Redistricting
November 10, 2021**

My name is Jean Handley and, although I am the Dauphin County Coordinator for Fair Districts PA, I submit this written testimony, not in that capacity, but as a resident of Dauphin County and citizen of this Commonwealth.

My focus is on three areas to consider when constructing the new Congressional districts:

- 1) Lack of choice or competitiveness in elections
- 2) Division of counties
- 3) Division of school districts

ELECTION CHOICE AND COMPETITIVENESS

When speaking to groups and individuals over the last 4+ years, I have repeatedly heard statements like “Why bother to vote when my vote doesn’t matter?” or “There is only one candidate running so they already won this general election in their primary. My vote is meaningless.” With closed primaries, this is especially noted by Independent voters. Voter frustration and disillusionment are palpable. Democracy is based on as many eligible voters as possible lending their voice to the conversation.

I cite the PA Congressional general elections from 2012 through 2020 as reasons why many voters hold these beliefs. NOTE: a win margin of greater than 10% is widely used as a standard to determine the competitiveness of an election.

Of the 90 PA Congressional general elections held during this time period only 12 were considered ‘competitive’. Candidates from both major parties are represented in the 78 uncompetitive elections. *In four of the 78 elections, the candidate ran unopposed.* I realize that rural areas tend to lean more Republican and urban areas more Democrat and thus some ‘self-sorting’ occurs. However, with voter registration in PA about equal among the two major parties with a slight advantage to Democrats, about 10% of voters registered as Independents, many areas of moderate or swing voters across the state, and pockets of red in blue areas and pockets of blue in red areas in the Commonwealth, there should be a greater effort to construct more competitive districts whenever possible. To do otherwise continues to marginalize hundreds of thousands of voters, eliminates their voices from the conversation and perpetuates their frustration with and distrust of our legislators and legislative institutions.

UNNECESSARY DIVISION OF COUNTIES

In Congressional redistricting, all states must comply with Federal requirements for districts of equal population and protections for ethnic and racial minorities. However, the General Assembly has not yet enacted constitutional or statutory standards to prevent unfair partisan gerrymandering of congressional districts of the kind I believe has occurred far too often in the Commonwealth.

I use Dauphin County and the 2011 Congressional map as an example. Dauphin County with a population of 268,100 in the 2010 census, was split into 3 congressional districts – 4, 11 and 15. District 15 stretched from the far south west corner of Dauphin County to the New Jersey border near Easton. It included parts of Berks, Dauphin, Lebanon and Northampton Counties and all of Lehigh County. District 11 stretched from the western border of Cumberland County near Shippensburg to the northern border of Wyoming County to include parts of 6 counties and 3 more entire counties. District 4 included Adams and York Counties, the eastern part of Cumberland County and crossed the Susquehanna River to include parts of Harrisburg City and Susquehanna Township in Dauphin County. Susquehanna Township was divided with Ward 1 and part of Ward 3 in District 4 and the remainder of the township in District 11. Harrisburg City was divided with Ward 1 in District 11 and the remainder of Harrisburg in District 4. West Hanover Township was split between Districts 11 and 15. These divisions caused voter confusion and extra taxpayer expense and split what some would call ‘communities of interest’.

In its 2018 decision, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court applied essentially the same standards that our state Constitution requires for legislative redistricting. The Court said congressional districts should be:

“... composed of compact and contiguous territory; as nearly equal in population as practicable; and which do not divide any county, city, incorporated town, borough, township or ward, except where necessary to ensure equality of population.”

Dauphin County has a population of 286, 401 according to the 2020 census. Based on population, it is possible to keep the county whole within one congressional district. It should be combined with other counties or areas with similar demographics, concerns and issues and, if at all possible, should remain whole. The current Congressional District 10, serves as a good example for the new congressional district. It encompasses the Tri County Capital Region of Dauphin, Eastern Cumberland and Northern York Counties with similar issues, shared commerce and economic concerns. It has a mix of rural, suburban and urban populations, and similar numbers of registered voters of both major parties, independents and other non-affiliated categories. It was also a district with one of the very few ‘competitive races’ in both 2018 and 2020 with 51.3% Republican to 48.7% Democrat and 53.3% Republican to 46.7% Democrat respectively.

The new district should also not include parts of *multiple* counties such as was done in 2011. However, if a division is considered *absolutely* necessary, it should not be divided more than

once, it should not be done to favor a party or candidate and an attempt to achieve a reasonably competitive district should be made.

DIVISION OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS

When the 2011 congressional districts were drawn, 5 of the 12 Dauphin County school districts were divided between two Congressmen. Avoiding division of school districts in congressional districts should be an important consideration. In many cases, the residents have common interests, concerns and values. In addition, having multiple legislators representing a school district potentially hinders the ability to have their specific concerns and needs heard and addressed.

IN SUMMARY

The districts you draw will impact legislative agenda, policy and Pennsylvania politics, thus the constituents of this Commonwealth for at least the next decade. I ask that you take into serious consideration whenever possible the following:

- Election choice and competitiveness
- Division of counties
- Division of school districts

To increase transparency and public input, I ask that:

- A portal be opened so citizens can submit their maps and those maps can be viewed by committee members and the public.
- Either utilize the criteria, values and metrics contained in the Legislative and Congressional Redistricting Act (still in committee) or share with the public the criteria and values that you plan to use prior to drawing and presenting the preliminary map.
- The public must be given ample time to review the preliminary map and adequate opportunity for comment so that adjustments can be made in completion of the final map.

The opportunity to make an historic, positive impact on PA Congressional redistricting and restoration of the public trust and confidence rests in your hands. It is not what is said, but the end result that will determine your success. Citizens are calling for transparency, accountability, meaningful public input and well-defined, sensible map-drawing criteria. They are counting on you!

Please consider my comments as submitted testimony to the Committee.