

Maps and Written Comment for Senate SGC Hearing

Congressional Redistricting Nov. 10, 2021

My name is Ruth Yeiser. I live in Lower Frederick Township in Montgomery County. In August, I submitted written comment to the Senate State Gov't Committee about Congressional Redistricting. I submitted similar comment to the House State Gov't Committee. In that comment, I noted that Lower Frederick township had been assigned to a pre-baked red district in 2011 and then to a pre-baked blue district in 2018. Since Lower Frederick's voting patterns are purple, both placements were inappropriate. As purple districts present opportunities for purple voters to send moderates to Washington, purple areas should be respected whenever possible. When I submitted my comments, I was anticipating that the Redistricting PA website would open a portal so that citizens could submit their own maps. That portal has not opened, so I am including some links to some maps that respect the extreme purpleness of both Berks County and of Northern Montgomery County. Note: I stayed within the 0.75% threshold for population deviation that has been tolerated by the courts. From a common-sense perspective, cracking precincts to bring the population deviation down to 0 is absurd. A population deviation of 0 happened for a fleeting moment in time and therefore means very little. A population deviation of 0 should not be used as a reason to create confusion by cracking precincts. In the time that it has taken me to type this sentence, there has been birth and death, people have moved, and new homes have become available. For a more detailed explanation, see Pat Beaty's written testimony from the October 28 House State Gov't Committee Hearing. (pages 75-76 of the submitted testimony).

I am sharing 5 maps that respect the purpleness of Northern Montco and Berks County. As always, there is tension between compactness, splits, partisan bias and purple and this tension is reflected in the five maps. In fact, I originally drew 3 maps... I thought I was following LACRA guidelines of county population +1. Then I realized that under LACRA guidelines, Chester County could only have 2 congressional districts. So back to the drawing board I went. When I followed LACRA with my original purple district, I could not achieve the county split scores that I had been achieving. The Lehigh Valley congressional district also became a little bit bluer. Maps A-C do not follow LACRA rules due to the extra split in Chester County. Maps D-E do follow LACRA guidelines. All maps feature the Berks/Northern Montco purple squeaker. I define a squeaker as an election that, according to the composite, will likely be won with less than 51% of the vote.

Map A: Despite violating LACRA for one county, this map has a very good split score and a good compactness score. 7 districts lean red, 5 districts lean blue. 5 districts are purple. Two of the purple districts are "squeakers". At 7.57, the seat bias for this map is higher than the natural geographic seat bias of 6% that Republicans enjoy. Here is a link to Map A:

<https://davesredistricting.org/join/2aa2219f-8b69-4326-ac43-c64af439c48d>

Map B: This map adds a very purple area connecting Harrisburg, York and Lancaster. In this map, 6 districts lean red, 5 districts lean blue while 6 districts are purple. Three of those purple districts (including the one in Central PA) are squeakers. This map still has a reasonable compact score and a good split score. At 5.92%, it also falls in the range of the natural geographic seat bias of 6% that Republicans enjoy. Here is a link to Map B: <https://davesredistricting.org/join/aedf9b60-f31d-47c1-af3b-32cd098193c6>

Map C: This map includes the squeakers from Maps A and B and adds a squeaker in Allegheny County. In this map, 5 districts lean D, 6 districts lean R. 6 districts are purple and 4 of those purple districts are squeakers. The Allegheny Squeaker has to wrap around the eastern and southern suburbs of Pittsburgh to pick up purple voters. It does fall in the 6% range of seat bias at 6.65%. Here is a link to Map C: <https://davesredistricting.org/join/1aa3edd7-5adc-4878-8121-5b8b4e2ae93e>

Map D: This map continues to feature the Montco/Berks squeaker. Unlike Maps A-C, it follows LACRA guidelines by reducing the number of districts in Chester to two. 6 R districts, 5 D districts and 6 purple districts. It makes use of a squeaker in Central PA, but loses the squeaker in the Lehigh Valley. Despite following LACRA rules on splitting, the split score and the compactness score is below those scores in Maps A-C. The seat bias falls in the 6% range. Here is a link to Map D: <https://davesredistricting.org/join/0a82619b-838e-4560-aa67-5c7f779a904f>

Map E: This map keeps just the Montco/Berks squeaker and attempts a better split and compactness score. The result was 7 R districts, 5 D districts and 5 purple districts—only one of which is a squeaker. The compactness score improved, but the split score is still low. The seat bias fell above the range of the natural geographic bias for Republicans. Here is a link to Map E: <https://davesredistricting.org/join/fb205d1d-09bb-4da7-954d-f42d06390d39>

This long exercise lends itself well to the importance of defining and following criteria and explaining those criteria to the public. In this exercise, my criteria for picking the “best” map are as follows:

- The seat bias should fall close to 6% to mirror but not overly exceed the natural geographic bias towards Republicans.
- Splits should be minimized. Compactness is important, but there should be a recognition that not splitting counties can lead to a less compact district. Seeing that split scores can be significantly higher even if one county is in violation of LACRA, I’m inclined to prioritize actual split scores over an exact following of LACRA.
- Solid “minority” score
- I like purple—especially in naturally occurring squeaky purple areas. While I’d like to see a map that makes use of the naturally occurring very purple areas in my part of the state, the use of the Montco-Berks purple district was an example, not a showstopper.
- Pop Deviation should remain within the 0.75% established by the courts. Taking advantage of this latitude helps to reduce splitting of municipalities and counties.

As I noted in previous comments, assuming that the mapping portal opens, you will receive many maps that fit the criteria of a “good” map in terms of county splits, majority minority districts, compactness, contiguity, population deviation... I hope that you will be up front with your criteria. Define your criteria for yourselves and for the public. And then follow that criteria to choose a map from the “good” ones that are submitted.

Thank you for considering my ideas.