

Testimony of Cristina Beuger (Allegheny Regional Hearing)

My name is Cristina Beuger and I'm a resident of Mt. Lebanon in Allegheny County. I am currently the Second Vice President of the League of Women Voters of Greater Pittsburgh and am submitting this testimony on behalf of that organization.

The League is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government and influences public policy through education and advocacy. It is a political organization in that we take action on public policy positions established through member study and agreement. The League never supports or opposes any political party or any candidate.

For those of you who do not know, the League nationally, in Pennsylvania and here in Allegheny County has long advocated for a better, fairer, more transparent redistricting process. We have worked on this issue for more than 50 years. In fact, the League of Women Voters of PA was one of the plaintiffs in the case brought to the PA Supreme Court in 2018 challenging the 2011 maps for Congressional redistricting. That successful challenge resulted in a redrawing of a Congressional map that we believe more fairly represents the voters of Pennsylvania.

The League believes that responsibility for redistricting preferably should be vested in an independent special commission that includes citizens at large, representatives of public interest groups, and members of minority groups.

Unfortunately, the legislation supporting such a commission never received a vote in the PA Legislature and we must deal with the process as it currently exists. In view of that, I believe there are some general parameters that should be adhered to.

Any redistricting process, whether Congressional or Legislative, should include the following:

- Specific timelines for the steps leading to a redistricting plan
- Full disclosure throughout the process and public hearings, most particularly on the plan proposed for adoption
- We suggest that all testimony, whether written or provided orally should be available to the public in an easily accessible method
- Any redistricting plan that is developed should be based on the following standards:
 - Substantially equal population within a geographic contiguity
 - Effective representation of racial and linguistic minorities
 - Preservation and protection of "communities of interest"
 - Respect for boundaries of municipalities, school districts and counties
 - Compactness

Any plan should also explicitly reject protection of incumbents through such devices as considering an incumbent's address. There also should be no preferential treatment for a political party, through such devices as considering party affiliation, voting history and candidate residence.

I commend the House State Government Committee for convening these public hearings throughout the state during this month and continuing into September and October. That is certainly a good step toward transparency.

However, it is concerning that these hearings are not being conducted jointly with the Senate State Government Committee since whatever plan is ultimately drawn up must be agreed to by both chambers. By conducting separate hearings, you are forcing Pennsylvania citizens to provide the same information in separate locations, at separate times. In addition, this location, as an example, is not easily accessible by mass transit, and your failure to provide the option of virtual testimony, especially in view of rising Covid cases, may have limited people's ability to voice their concerns.

We also strongly urge you to look at the issue of prison gerrymandering. Prisoners should be counted at their last home address. This would correct an inequity in certain locales.

Now I'd like to draw your attention to some specific Allegheny County concerns. Based on the 2010 census, each Congressional District should have contained around 710,000 people. At that time, Allegheny County's population was 1,223,348; Beaver County 170,000; Westmoreland County 365,169, Washington County 207,929; Cambria 143,450; Fayette 136,438; Lawrence 91,003; Somerset 77,763 and Greene 36,685. The Allegheny County population could have supported two Congressional districts with perhaps one other smaller county such as Beaver added in. The districts would have been cohesive, contiguous with common interests and concerns. Instead what we got was the division of Allegheny County into 3 districts taking pieces of all the above-listed counties to make the numbers work. That 2011 map did not serve the citizens of Allegheny County well nor did it serve the residents of those other counties who were split multiple ways. That map was an example of egregious gerrymandering. While the Legislature may be unhappy with the Supreme Court redrawing the districts in 2018, the current map does a reasonable job of minimizing county splits and ensuring that Congressional representatives can adequately represent their constituents.

As you proceed with your process, please take into consideration some of the specifics of Allegheny County. It is an urban/exurban area which has migrated from heavy industry, although we still have some, to a robust medical, educational and technical hub with a growing, diverse population. We have 40 school districts, 130 municipalities. Our municipalities often function together with shared services, so in drawing Congressional Districts those things need to be considered.

Drawing a Congressional map during this year will be a challenge in that PA is losing a seat. In addition, the recently released census data suggests that population growth has not been even across the state with much of it concentrated in the areas around Philadelphia. This requires that any Congressional map be completely redrawn, rather than simply trying to tweak around the edges. The League strongly urges such an approach.

As you continue your hearings and begin the work of drawing a Congressional map, the LWVPGH asks that you consider the following:

- Pennsylvania voters should be informed of your actions in a transparent and open manner • There should be ample time for citizens to comment on proposed maps • The names and credentials of any mapping experts you utilize should be made known to voters. Mapping experts should be non-partisan • Any proposed map should be accompanied by the reasoning behind the map

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this statement on behalf of the League of Women Voters of Greater Pittsburgh