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COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STATE GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE

NORTH CENTRAL REGIONAL PUBLIC HEARING
ON CONGRESSIONAL REDISTRICTING

WELLSBORO FIRE ANNEX
EAST AVENUE
WELLSBORO, PENNSYLVANIA

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2021
4:02 P.M.

BEFORE:

- HONORABLE SETH GROVE, MAJORITY CHAIRMAN
- HONORABLE SCOTT CONKLIN, MINORITY CHAIRMAN
- HONORABLE RUSS DIAMOND (VIRTUAL)
- HONORABLE DAWN KEEFER
- HONORABLE ANDREW LEWIS (VIRTUAL)
- HONORABLE BRETT MILLER (VIRTUAL)
- HONORABLE ERIC NELSON (VIRTUAL)
- HONORABLE CLINT OWLETT
- HONORABLE FRANK RYAN (VIRTUAL)
- HONORABLE PAUL SCHEMEL (VIRTUAL)
- HONORABLE LOUIS SCHMITT (VIRTUAL)
- HONORABLE ISABELLA FITZGERALD (VIRTUAL)
- HONORABLE BENJAMIN SANCHEZ (VIRTUAL)
- HONORABLE JARED SOLOMON (VIRTUAL)

BRENDA J. PARDUN, RPR
REPORTER - NOTARY PUBLIC

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SUBMITTED WRITTEN TESTIMONY

* * *

(See submitted written testimony and handouts
online.)

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MAJORITY CHAIRMAN GROVE: Good afternoon. Today the House State Government Committee will convene the fourth of eight regional hearings across Pennsylvania on congressional redistricting.

Today we'll be hearing testimony about the north central region of our Commonwealth. Thank you, Representative Owlett and the Wellsville -- Wellsboro fire department for hosting us. I had Wellsville in my district in York County, so it's been a little tough conversion.

But any opening remarks, Representative Owlett?

REPRESENTATIVE OWLETT: We'll let you make that mistake once, I guess.

But, thank you for coming, and thank you to everybody that was able to make it out today. Thank you for those that are joining in online. And thanks for all the staff all -- that really put in a lot of hours to make this possible. We really do appreciate it.

And, Mr. Chairman, thank you for

1 coming up today.

2 I want to also thank those that are
3 here to testify and those that have submitted
4 written testimony. And I thank you for this
5 very transparent process that you've put
6 forth. And thank you for coming up here to
7 north central PA, really a great place to do a
8 hearing, I think, this time of year. And
9 we're excited to have you. So, thank you for
10 coming.

11 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN GROVE: As a matter
12 of housekeeping before we get started,
13 reminder that each testifier will be given ten
14 minutes to present their testimony before the
15 members of the committee. We will be keeping
16 firmly to these time limits. We are here to
17 listen; no questions will be asked of
18 testifiers.

19 Also, testifiers, please keep your
20 comments relevant to the topic at hand. We're
21 here to learn about this region of the state,
22 its industries, its values, its unique
23 communities of interest. And due to recent
24 changes to the Sunshine Law, subject matter of
25 testimony must be confined to the topic

1 hearing only. Testimony outside of the scope
2 of the hearing will not be permitted.

3 We are here to learn from you and
4 take your input on the congressional
5 redistricts that will be in effect for the
6 next decade. This is part of an important
7 task, so if a testifier begins to stray from
8 relevant testimony, I'll ask you to refocus on
9 the topic before us. If you cannot, I'll move
10 on to the next listed speaker.

11 We also ask that testifiers speak
12 clearly into the microphone and that any
13 attendees here in the room with us today
14 remain quiet and respectful. Today's public
15 input hearing is being live streamed at
16 www.paredistricting.com. It is also being
17 recorded. Please help us to ensure that those
18 who are watching at home can easily hear all
19 testimony.

20 Additionally, under the Sunshine Law,
21 if the videostream stops, we will recess the
22 hearing until the issue is fixed.

23 For the members attending virtually,
24 please ensure your microphones are off and
25 recognize if your video is on, we can see you.

1 I would also be remiss if I did not
2 also mention that, in addition to those
3 testifiers who are present today, the
4 committee has also received testimony from
5 people all across the Commonwealth who
6 submitted their written comments online. For
7 the north central region hearing, we received
8 testimony from Robert R., from Wellsboro,
9 Pennsylvania; Steven B., from State College,
10 Pennsylvania; Kathleen O., from Lemont,
11 Pennsylvania; Brooklyn J., from Cheltenham,
12 Pennsylvania; and Bintou F., from Meadville,
13 Pennsylvania; as well as Shane F., from
14 Watsontown.

15 The written testimony is before each
16 member of the House State Government Committee
17 for today's hearing, and it will be posted
18 online shortly after or -- shortly after we
19 conclude. I also want to remind people that
20 written testimony for the north central region
21 we'll continue to accept online at
22 www.paredistricting.com until October 12th, so
23 there's still time to participate this
24 evening.

25 And, finally, before we begin, to our

1 testifiers both in person and whose testimony
2 we hold in our hands, thank you for taking the
3 interest in redistricting and for
4 participating in this once-in-a-decade
5 process.

6 With that, any opening remarks,
7 Chairman Conklin?

8 MINORITY CHAIRMAN CONKLIN: I just
9 want to thank you, Chairman.

10 I want to thank Representative Owlett
11 and tell him what a lucky man he is to have
12 such a beautiful community as Wellsboro in
13 your district.

14 But, most of all, I want to thank
15 those individuals that had taken their time as
16 well for coming out tonight.

17 And I'm ready to listen.

18 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN GROVE: Sounds
19 good. With that, we will do introduction of
20 members. For the members here present, just
21 go ahead. It should be a short intro.
22 Members attending virtually, I'll just call
23 you one by one, and then just pop on and say
24 hello.

25 With that, Representative Keefer.

1 REPRESENTATIVE KEEFER:

2 Representative Dawn Keefer, 92nd District,
3 York and Cumberland counties.

4 REPRESENTATIVE OWLETT:

5 Representative Owlett, all of Tioga, part of
6 Potter, and part of Bradford County.

7 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN GROVE: Seth Grove,
8 196th District, York County.

9 MINORITY CHAIRMAN CONKLIN: Scott
10 Conklin, 77th District, Centre County.

11 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN GROVE:
12 Representative Lewis.

13 REPRESENTATIVE LEWIS: Thank you,
14 Chairman.

15 Representative Lewis, 105th District,
16 right down the road in lovely Dauphin County.
17 Great to be here.

18 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN GROVE: Right down
19 the road, two hours away.

20 Representative Miller.

21 REPRESENTATIVE MILLER: A little
22 farther down the road, this is Brad Miller,
23 state representative, 41st District, Lancaster
24 County.

25 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN GROVE: If you hop

1 in the Susquehanna, you can hit both those
2 district pretty quickly.

3 Representative Fitzgerald

4 REPRESENTATIVE FITZGERALD: Good
5 afternoon. Isabella Fitzgerald, representing
6 the 203rd Legislative District, Philadelphia
7 and north west -- West Oak Lane, East Oak
8 Lane, and the lower northeast.

9 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN GROVE:
10 Representative Ryan.

11 REPRESENTATIVE RYAN: Representative
12 Frank Ryan, representing 101st District, in
13 Lebanon County, PA.

14 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN GROVE:
15 Representative Schmitt.

16 You're muted, Lou.

17 REPRESENTATIVE SCHMITT: Can you hear
18 me now?

19 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN GROVE: Yes, sir.
20 Go ahead.

21 REPRESENTATIVE SCHMITT: Thanks.
22 Representative Lou Schmitt here, 79th
23 Legislative District, the city of Altoona and
24 the townships of Allegheny and Logan in Blair
25 County.

1 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN GROVE:

2 Representative Diamond.

3 REPRESENTATIVE DIAMOND:

4 Representative Russ Diamond, the better part
5 of Lebanon County, 102nd District.

6 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN GROVE:

7 Representative Sanchez.

8 REPRESENTATIVE SANCHEZ: Good
9 afternoon. Ben Sanchez, representing 153rd
10 District, in Montgomery County.

11 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN GROVE:

12 Representative Solomon.

13 REPRESENTATIVE SOLOMON: Good
14 afternoon. Jared Solomon, 202nd District, in
15 northeast Philadelphia.

16 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN GROVE: All right.
17 With that, we've covered all the members from
18 the committee.

19 With that, we will move on to our
20 first testifier, Jeffrey Reber. Did I get
21 that right?

22 MR. REBER: Reber.

23 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN GROVE: Reber.

24 Vice-Chair, Union County Board of
25 Commissioners.

1 Thank you so much, Commissioner, for
2 coming today. And when you're comfortable and
3 ready, please begin. The floor is yours.

4 Make sure your green light's on.

5 MR. REBER: Here we go.

6 Thank you, Chairman Grove, and thank
7 you to all the committee members for allowing
8 me to be here today to testify as all of your
9 efforts to ensure that Pennsylvania
10 congressional districts are fair and
11 transparently apportioned. Thank you so much
12 for all of your work.

13 As vice-chair of Union County
14 commissioners, as well as a small business
15 owner and someone who volunteers for several
16 regional and local organizations, I believe
17 not only in our county, I'm here to also speak
18 about a region.

19 So, not only in Union County, but a
20 region I'm going to term central Susquehanna
21 Valley includes Union, Snyder, Montour, and
22 Northumberland counties. I personally would
23 like to see all of those counties, in their
24 entireties, kept in one congressional
25 district.

1 I previously submitted written
2 testimony outlining all the details. I
3 certainly will not go into the details today,
4 but please refer to that as you wish.

5 But I've lived and worked my entire
6 life in the central Susquehanna Valley, and
7 I've experienced life under one congressional
8 district, like we have now, for the most part,
9 and where we've had several. And whenever I
10 have needed help or I've had friends that
11 needed help, it was always so much better when
12 we had one person to reach out to, we all knew
13 who it was. Right now, Congressman Keller,
14 his district is what covers the majority of
15 the four counties that I talked about. And
16 it's so much better to get -- and he's -- it's
17 -- the representatives are so much more
18 responsive when we are a larger portion of one
19 congressional district as opposed to two or
20 more.

21 We also -- as the chair of the
22 election board, Union County Election Board, I
23 can assure you that it is much better when we
24 have representation from as few individuals as
25 possible, so that when citizens contact me or

1 those in our election office, we can more
2 easily refer them to the proper person to make
3 a contact with. When we are split up, either
4 by county or municipality, and we have to
5 think about, okay, if this person lives here,
6 let's make it this contact, if this person
7 lives here, let's make it this contact.

8 Hey, if they're in Union County, they
9 think, I'm a Union County person, right, I
10 should have one contact. But I do know of
11 previously of different situations where they
12 have been referred to a representative,
13 accidentally called the wrong one, then
14 there's frustration that comes about. And the
15 fact that, you know, whatever they needed help
16 with just doesn't get helped -- so -- as
17 quickly as they could.

18 So, I would encourage you, even from
19 that regard, to make sure that we're all
20 together.

21 And then, if you look at those four
22 counties, we share a lot of common resources
23 and a lot of commonality amongst the people
24 and the citizens within those areas, in
25 agriculture, in health care, in tourism. I

1 mean, our people that live in Union County,
2 they work in any of those other four counties.
3 It's such a -- from a health care perspective,
4 for instance, we have, basically, Evangelical
5 Hospital and Geisinger Hospital. And we have
6 people who, they're kind of interchangeable in
7 a way, from the standpoint of where you go.
8 It's just, I'm going to Geisinger, hey, that's
9 not a big deal, you're just traveling over the
10 borders.

11 And in our agricultural community,
12 people who grow crops or, you know, raise
13 cattle or whatever, do any sort of farming in
14 Union County, need the resources from the
15 surrounding counties as well. And they're so
16 interconnected. When I go to
17 agricultural-related meetings, there's people
18 from these four counties all together. We
19 have a common good, and we have a common
20 interest. And it would just be so much better
21 if we remained in one particular congressional
22 district.

23 And it's -- we'd much rather be a
24 larger fish in anybody's pond than we would a
25 smaller fish in three or four different ponds.

1 So, with that, again, I'll just thank
2 you for allowing me to provide some testimony
3 today. And, please, you know, feel free to
4 follow up with my written testimony. I'm
5 happy to answer any questions.

6 So, thank you.

7 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN GROVE: Thank you
8 so much. Really appreciate your time this
9 evening and appreciate your willingness to
10 come testify on such an important issue on
11 behalf of the residence of Union County. So,
12 thank you so much.

13 MR. REBER: Thank you, Chairman.

14 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN GROVE: Next we
15 have Roger Bunn, vice-chair, Tioga County
16 Board of Commissioners, Wellsboro,
17 Pennsylvania.

18 Mr. Bunn, thank you so much for
19 joining us this evening. Appreciate your time
20 and your willingness to testify. And when you
21 are comfortable and ready, the floor is yours.
22 Just make sure you hit that green button on
23 the microphone to make sure we're live.

24 MR. BUNN: The green light is on. Am
25 I on?

1 All right. Great. Welcome to Tioga
2 County and to Wellsboro. We're glad you're
3 here.

4 Mr. Chairman and members of the
5 committee, the Tioga County Board of
6 Commissioners wish to thank you and this
7 esteemed committee for the opportunity to
8 comment on the important issues of how our
9 congressional district will be geographically
10 defined for the next decade. I will be brief.

11 The Tioga County Board of
12 Commissioners offer no change to the
13 geographical boundaries already established
14 that define our political boundaries. As
15 currently defined, all of Tioga County is
16 included in the 12th congressional district.
17 Regionally, our composition of rural needs is
18 understood by those who represent Tioga County
19 and surrounding counties, and any proposal to
20 reconstruct our area simply to create a
21 different geographic area does not have
22 justification, in our opinion.

23 It is, however, critical that, in any
24 event, that our county remain as a whole in a
25 redistricting project. For our county to be

1 divided amongst multiple districts would
2 create undue burden on our elected officials,
3 create confusion with our electorate, and make
4 clear communication with our state elected
5 officials more difficult. We respectfully
6 request that our congressional boundaries, as
7 currently defined, remain unchanged.

8 Thank you for your time and efforts
9 in this most important issue. Signed by the
10 Tioga County Commissioners.

11 Thank you.

12 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN GROVE: Thank you
13 so much, Commissioner Bunn. Appreciate your
14 willingness to come testify and participate
15 this evening.

16 Before we head to our next testifier,
17 if Representative Eric Nelson wants to chime
18 in and say hi, he's participating virtually.

19 REPRESENTATIVE NELSON: Hello. Thank
20 you, Mr. Chair. Appreciate being a part of
21 the hearing. Hello from Westmoreland County.

22 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN GROVE: Thank you.

23 Next testifier, Malcolm Derk, Greater
24 Susquehanna Valley Chamber of Commerce, from
25 Freeburg, Pennsylvania.

1 Mr. Derk, thank you so much for
2 coming and testifying this evening. And when
3 you're comfortable and ready, and as long as
4 that green light is on, the floor is yours.

5 MR. DERK: Thank you very much.

6 On behalf of the Greater Susquehanna
7 Valley Chamber of Commerce, the greater
8 Susquehanna Valley, please accept our
9 gratitude for the opportunity to share remarks
10 with you today to the State Government
11 Committee.

12 Representative Seth Grove and
13 Representative Scott Conklin, I thank you, as
14 chairs of this committee, for allowing us this
15 opportunity.

16 And Representative Owlett, I
17 appreciate being in Wellsboro, your home
18 district.

19 So, thank you for this opportunity.

20 I hope to share some information that
21 would be helpful to you, as you go about this
22 very important work of congressional
23 redistricting. My name is Malcolm Derk, and I
24 am the chair of the Government Affairs
25 Committee of the Greater Susquehanna Valley

1 Chamber.

2 The testimony I share today is the
3 result of several listening sessions that
4 we've held with our members, and we're a very
5 diverse chamber that has health care,
6 educational members, as well as a variety of
7 wood products industries represented. The
8 views do not necessarily reflect the views of
9 my employer or the leadership of the chamber,
10 but are the general consensus of those
11 listening sessions that we held at the Greater
12 Susquehanna Valley Chamber. We hope that you
13 find these comments to be useful as you move
14 ahead with your important work.

15 I appreciate the momentous task that
16 you now have, as we know that the census has
17 required that Pennsylvania will lose one
18 congressional representative, one seat, and it
19 requires you to look at all of the lines once
20 again, something that I don't envy.

21 As you move forward with this
22 important work, our chamber members really
23 would like you to look at three overarching
24 points: the natural travel patterns of
25 constituents; communities of interest; and

1 recognizable boundaries, specifically
2 boundaries that are familiar to residents and
3 distinguishable by voters.

4 Travel patterns in the region take
5 advantage of highways and road systems that
6 tie our region together, and in our home
7 communities -- Snyder, Union, Northumberland,
8 and Montour counties -- we're blessed with
9 having a robust system of highways and bridges
10 that tie those communities together and create
11 a network that feels very much like a unified
12 community. We live, work, recreate, and
13 engage in commerce based on the ease by which
14 we're able to travel. And along the 11 and 15
15 corridor in Snyder County, a large number of
16 retail establishments, restaurants, lodging
17 options, and grocery stores are located in
18 Shamokin Dam, Selinsgrove, and in Monroe
19 Township, and these amenities draw neighbors
20 from their surrounding counties, and it really
21 covers a large radius of the population.

22 In areas where natural travel
23 patterns are considered by a lack of connected
24 infrastructure, it really makes it difficult
25 for those communities to share common

1 interests. But we are thankful that our
2 chamber region really does have that unified
3 feel because of the reliable transportation
4 infrastructure that has been supported by
5 federal and state governments.

6 More and more, the travel patterns in
7 our region also encompass Lycoming and
8 Columbia County, as the central Susquehanna
9 Valley throughway is under construction and
10 continues to tie us closer to Interstate 80
11 and that important corridor.

12 Our large employers, such as major
13 health systems of Geisinger and UPMC, they
14 provide jobs that pull employees from a
15 multi-county region that includes Lycoming,
16 Columbia, Montour, Union, Snyder, and
17 Northumberland counties. Educational
18 institutions like Bucknell and Susquehanna
19 also require a larger area to recruit capable
20 employees that are educated and skilled
21 workers.

22 The wood products industry also is
23 not alone, and that's in Snyder and Union
24 County. We have a variety of wood products
25 industries, cabinetry makers and others that

1 require a large amount of skilled workforce
2 that pull from a multi-county area.

3 These employees are required to
4 continue to look beyond just one county
5 boundary. So, again, this creates a sense of
6 a unified feel and a community of interest in
7 the broader surrounding area.

8 While not a watershed in the
9 traditional sense, we think of the
10 transportation corridor as creating
11 communities of interest in a similar way that
12 streams, creeks, and rivers create a
13 watershed. So, we call it -- rather than a
14 watershed, we call it a job shed or an
15 employment shed, and it's the catchment basin
16 that our various large employers use to find
17 skilled workers.

18 We ask that the committee consider
19 these flows of people for work and for
20 commerce as you engage and establish new
21 congressional boundaries. I am certain that
22 each of you see similar movements within your
23 community and in the cohesion created by work
24 forces and travel patterns.

25 In our rural region, it's not

1 uncommon for many of our neighbors to commute
2 to other counties, thirty to forty minutes to
3 an hour away, to find meaningful employment
4 that's family-sustaining. Such a commute in
5 an urban area may be traveling just a few
6 miles, but in our rural community, such travel
7 times can get us thirty to fifty miles away
8 from home. And that's another area that I'd
9 like you to consider as you look at this
10 important work.

11 Communities of interest are also
12 created by the ways we collaborate with
13 neighbors, and Jeff Reber, from Union County,
14 mentioned that there are various ways that
15 counties collaborate for services. In Snyder,
16 Union, and Northumberland County, the region
17 established the central Susquehanna 911
18 system. The three-county collaboration shows
19 how small rural counties can work together to
20 improve efficiency, cost, reliability, and
21 improve scale. The 911 system also partners
22 with several other counties in using a shared
23 phone system that includes Lycoming County as
24 well.

25 Union and Snyder County and other --

1 other agencies also collaborate for
2 transportation with Rabbit Transit and
3 community action agencies that are shared
4 across county boundaries. And in our area --
5 the Snyder, Union, Northumberland County
6 region, we often refer to all three counties
7 as the SUN counties because they partner on so
8 many different varieties of social service and
9 government-administered funds.

10 Other social and nonprofit
11 organizations also function in this
12 multi-county way. The Greater Susquehanna
13 Valley United Way, the Red Cross, and the
14 Susquehanna Valley Visitors Bureau also all
15 share this regional approach. Grouping these
16 collaborative communities together in one
17 congressional district makes a lot of sense
18 because they do share this common interest.

19 Communities of interest are also
20 created by media coverage, and I think that's
21 one thing that you can appreciate in your
22 roles. The chamber has several newspapers and
23 other media providers that offer quality
24 coverage and reporting to help inform the
25 citizenry. The Daily Item, for example,

1 covers the counties of Snyder, Union, and
2 Northumberland, and Montour, and 1070 WKOK AM
3 provides coverage of local events and also a
4 talk radio program to help inform people
5 Monday through Friday of local news coverages.

6 The media assets help to inform the
7 public regarding their government decision
8 making. We are also fortunate that these
9 media markets align with the current
10 congressional districts and our chamber
11 region. Helping our members and fellow
12 citizens receive current and transparent
13 information is important to consider in
14 district lines. These media groups create
15 affinity in the region, as we seek to have an
16 informed populace. We should not
17 underestimate the importance of regional media
18 in creating communities of interest. It is
19 important for the public to know what their
20 elected officials are doing and to know how to
21 access government.

22 I would like to dedicate the final
23 portion of my testimony to the importance of
24 maintaining, wherever possible, recognizable
25 municipal boundaries. Keeping an entire

1 county within the same congressional district
2 helps to avoid confusion among voters and
3 provides an ease in recognizing districts.
4 Keeping counties whole should be a goal,
5 wherever possible. But we also realize that
6 there are population shifts that make this
7 difficult in some instances.

8 We humbly request that when that does
9 happen that you do your best to find other
10 recognizable political subdivisions that help
11 to make sure we maintain communities of
12 interest and, for example, if there has to be
13 a split of a county, perhaps there's two
14 school districts in that county, that a whole
15 school district would remain intact.

16 Likewise, if you look at smaller
17 subdivisions such as a borough or a township,
18 we ask that those be kept whole as much as
19 possible.

20 As our members or neighbors ask for
21 how to contact their congressional
22 representatives, it's helpful for entire
23 communities to be kept together to avoid
24 confusion at the ballot box or as people seek
25 constituent services.

1 Please keep municipalities and
2 communities of interest whole as much as
3 possible.

4 Thank you, again, for your time today
5 and for your interest in creating fair
6 districts and for creating this transparent
7 process where the public can engage with you
8 and your colleagues across the state.

9 Thank you again for your time.

10 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN GROVE: Thank you
11 so much.

12 Just to let you know, Rabbit
13 Transit's executive director is my HOA
14 president.

15 MR. DERK: Wonderful. Then you
16 certainly know the work.

17 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN GROVE: Right.
18 Right. That's good stuff. So, thank you so
19 much.

20 MR. DERK: Thank you.

21 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN GROVE: Appreciate
22 your time and your testimony.

23 We do have another member joining us
24 online, Representative Paul Schemel.

25 If you want to hop on, Paul, and say

1 hi, introduce yourself.

2 REPRESENTATIVE SCHEMEL: Hi. Thanks
3 so much. Look forward to the testimony.

4 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN GROVE: Thank you.

5 Next we have Jason Fink,
6 Williamsport/Lycoming Chamber of Commerce,
7 Williamsport, Pennsylvania.

8 Mr. Fink, thank you so much for
9 joining us and taking time out of your
10 schedule to do that. We look forward to your
11 testimony. And when you're comfortable and
12 ready, go ahead and begin.

13 MR. FINK: Sounds good. Thank you.

14 Good afternoon. My name is Jason
15 Fink, and I'm the president and CEO of the
16 Williamsport/Lycoming Chamber of Commerce.

17 Thank you to the House State
18 Government Committee for this opportunity to
19 address the upcoming congressional
20 redistricting here in Pennsylvania. I
21 appreciate the fact that you are doing these
22 across Pennsylvania and giving areas such as
23 ours the opportunity to voice their thoughts
24 on what should be considered for how the new
25 districts will be drawn and accommodating the

1 loss of one of our congressional seats.

2 To begin with my comments, I'd like
3 to give you a baseline of Lycoming County. We
4 have a population of roughly 114,000 people
5 and are one of fourteen MSAs here in the
6 Commonwealth. Most of our population can be
7 found in the greater Williamsport area. The
8 city itself is a population of approximately
9 28,000 people, and the greater Williamsport
10 area is just under 90,000.

11 There are eight public school
12 districts in the county. We have two
13 colleges: Pennsylvania College of Technology,
14 with a student population of 4500, and
15 Lycoming College, with a student population of
16 1500.

17 We have a strong industrial base here
18 in the county. Manufacturing is vibrant and
19 growing, as we see new industries such as
20 Digger Specialities and Chance Aluminum
21 establishing new operations here. We're also
22 seeing growth with existing manufactures, such
23 as West Pharmaceuticals and Shop-Vac
24 Corporation.

25 Additionally, we have a strong

1 presence of industry that conduct federal work
2 with the Department of Defense, including L3
3 Harris, Lycoming Engineers, Spartronics, PMF
4 Industries, and QorTek.

5 The county has major highways running
6 through it, with I-180, US 15, and US 220. It
7 has rail service with mainline service by NS
8 and short-line service with North Shore
9 Railroad. We also have the Williamsport
10 Regional Airport.

11 It should also be noted that we are
12 also home to the US Middle District Courthouse
13 in Williamsport.

14 Given the size of our county, we are
15 first and foremost concerned about ensuring
16 that any redistricting be done which keeps
17 Lycoming County whole. This has been mostly
18 the case when maps have been drawn, however it
19 hasn't always been that way. From 2000 to
20 2010, Lycoming County was split with roughly
21 two-thirds of the county being in the 5th
22 Congressional District and the remaining
23 portion in the 15th Congressional District.

24 Our congressmen during that time were
25 John Peterson and Glenn Thompson. Both were

1 great to work with, however it was difficult
2 at times for us, in trying to work with them
3 on a county-wide -- on county-wide issues
4 given the nature in which we were divided.

5 Having been through something like
6 this in our not-to-distant past, we would
7 strongly encourage those in finalizing the new
8 congressional districts to keep Lycoming
9 County whole.

10 We would next request that, as the
11 maps are drawn, that consideration been given
12 to provide us to be included with neighboring
13 counties, as is currently done. Those
14 counties that I speak of include Clinton,
15 Tioga, Union, Northumberland, Snyder, and
16 Sullivan. There are many items that we work
17 with these counties on, as all but two of
18 these are in the same local development
19 district, SEDA-COG.

20 Specifically to the chamber, we have
21 a number of workforce development
22 opportunities that we work with neighboring
23 counties here in the region. Our commute shed
24 for industries in our counties include all
25 that were mentioned. Area industries also

1 rely upon colleges in the region, including
2 Bucknell, Susquehanna, Lock Haven, and
3 Mansfield. There also is greater involvement
4 with current technical schools, such as SUN
5 vo-tech and Central Mountain.

6 It is understood that there will be
7 changes that need to be made based upon the
8 loss of our congressional seat. This is part
9 of a larger problem that we, as
10 Pennsylvanians, need to look at addressing now
11 so that we don't see this occurrence in 2030,
12 when the next census is complete.

13 For now, though, we ask that Lycoming
14 County be kept whole and that our existing
15 relationships with neighboring counties be
16 maintained as they currently are in developing
17 this new congressional map.

18 Thank you for taking this request in
19 consideration.

20 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN GROVE: Thank you
21 very much for your testimony and your time
22 this evening. Really appreciate it.

23 Next testifier is Mary Anne Heston,
24 Hector Township, Pennsylvania.

25 Mary Anne, come on up. And when you

1 are comfortable and ready, please feel free to
2 begin, and just make sure that green light is
3 on.

4 MS. HESTON: First of all, I want to
5 preface my written testimony with the comments
6 that I saw this hearing as an opportunity to
7 learn more about districting, the drawing of
8 districts. And having listened to the
9 previous speakers today, I realize, you know,
10 it was -- it's very valuable to be here and to
11 learn from them because, certainly, they have
12 done a good job of identifying communities of
13 interest in our region and specifically for
14 their particular counties.

15 So, thank you for holding this
16 hearing. And thank you for the opportunity to
17 share these comments today. I speak not as an
18 expert by any means but as a concerned citizen
19 who wants to advocate, first and foremost, for
20 a fair process in the determination of
21 district boundaries.

22 The current state of political
23 affairs in our Commonwealth and in our nation
24 is a sad spectacle of partisan stalemate,
25 where conflict seems to draw more time and

1 energy than constructive negotiations for a
2 better future.

3 We can change this. And a big step
4 forward lies in the process of fair
5 redistricting. Why? Because voter
6 participation and citizen engagement begin
7 with trust in the system, where every
8 registered voter's ballot counts and where
9 representation is equitable.

10 We who live in the north central
11 region of PA understand that, in order to
12 reach the required population quota for
13 congressional representation, our district
14 must cover a great geographic area, difficult
15 for any congressperson to travel and attend to
16 regularly. While our means of communication
17 have greatly improved over the past decades,
18 distance and contiguous boundaries are
19 important to consider as districts are drawn.

20 Perhaps few people are better
21 positioned to know the needs and challenges of
22 the region than the various north central
23 counties' commissioners. Daily, they must
24 consider multiple demands on revenue and
25 resources. They often must work across county

1 lines, as has been illustrated in the previous
2 testimony, in alliance with other
3 commissioners, to access funds and build
4 programs that address mutual concerns.

5 I contacted the Potter County
6 commissioners to request that they provide
7 testimony as well. And I hope they do. If
8 you have not done so already, I would suggest
9 that you actively solicit the input of all the
10 commissioners of the north central counties
11 for this important process. Considering their
12 multiple responsibilities, press releases
13 alone may have escaped their attention.

14 Education; business; industry;
15 farming; tourism; health care, including
16 mental health; emergency response; veteran
17 support infrastructure; and the wise use and
18 conservation of our precious natural resources
19 are among the many important enterprises of
20 our region. Working together with local
21 officials, state representatives and senators,
22 our congressional representative is our vital
23 advocate to the federal government. You know
24 this, and forgive me for stating the obvious,
25 but it is good to be reminded of the

1 importance of your task, especially as you
2 travel throughout the state, and weigh so many
3 concerns.

4 Don't let repetition dull your
5 commitment. People care. We want a more
6 responsive government. Perceived fairness is
7 a powerful incentive to participate, not just
8 as voters, but as engaged citizens.

9 Thank you for your consideration.

10 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN GROVE: Thank you
11 so much. Really appreciate your time and your
12 willingness to come testify this evening. We
13 really appreciate that.

14 Our next testifier is Janet Gyekis --
15 I just double-checked on how to pronounce your
16 last name so I didn't butcher it.

17 MS. GYEKIS: You did well.

18 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN GROVE: Thank
19 you -- Wellsboro, Pennsylvania.

20 And, Janet, when you're comfortable
21 and ready, please begin, and then just make
22 sure the green light's on, and you're good to
23 go.

24 MS. GYEKIS: Okay. Well, I think I
25 have all this, but I don't have my speech. I

1 will find it among all these papers, I bet
2 you.

3 REPRESENTATIVE OWLETT: We have a
4 copy up here, if you need one.

5 MS. GYEKIS: Here we go.

6 So, dear members of the Pennsylvania
7 State Government Committee, thank you for
8 considering my testimony about the 2021
9 process of redistricting congressional
10 districts in Pennsylvania and the
11 redistricting process in general in our state.

12 I have been a voter for fifty-six
13 years, worked at the election polls for four
14 years. I'm a retired teacher of twenty-nine
15 years, US Census enumerator for the 2010 and
16 2020 census, a registered Republican and a
17 Sunday School teacher.

18 When you are finally in the map
19 drawing process, I have two requests. There
20 is a time limit when the final district maps
21 need to be approved. In 2011, the maps were
22 presented to the public so close to the
23 deadline that there was, in effect, no time to
24 modify the maps after public input.

25 Number one, please present the maps

1 to the public with enough time for
2 modifications to be made.

3 Number two, start with a clean map.
4 Consider the needs of the people over the
5 needs of the incumbents.

6 So, I'm going to speak to you about
7 the citizens of Tioga County and their
8 feelings about the redistricting process from
9 my experience during the past three years.

10 Prior to 2018, I felt that our
11 representatives and senators were
12 Pennsylvanians before they were a member of a
13 political party. I had never seen a
14 representatives email with their name
15 connected with a D or an R in their address
16 until the last decade. That surprised me.
17 But I soon became aware, very concerned with
18 the extremely partisan process of governing,
19 as opposed to "this is what we need to do" for
20 the good our state and of the country.

21 In the Senate and House of
22 Representatives of Pennsylvania, in our US
23 congressional system in Washington, D.C., the
24 gridlock and polarization has been frustrating
25 and frightening for concerned citizenry to

1 see.

2 About this time, I became aware of
3 the highly partisan drawing of district lines
4 after the 2010 census. And this was the map.
5 It was a process of politicians choosing their
6 own voters. I have become convinced that the
7 results of that extremely partisan process
8 have been grossly detrimental to responsible
9 governing in Pennsylvania and in the US.

10 I became aware of a grassroots group
11 of Pennsylvanians who not only wanted to
12 change the system, but they had a plan to put
13 in the old process's place. An independent
14 citizens redistricting commission made sense
15 to me. There were four other like-minded
16 Tioga county citizens who had the same idea.
17 We were a nonpartisan group of two Republicans
18 and three Democrats, two men and three women.

19 We decided to visit every township
20 and borough in Tioga County, show them the
21 2011 gerrymandered, and explain the new
22 redistricting and constitutional amendment
23 process. We had a resolution for them to sign
24 and to show their support for.

25 Let's see. There -- we visited all

1 thirty-nine townships and borough at least
2 once, sometimes twice, and occasionally three
3 times, using our own considerable time,
4 effort, and money. More than half signed the
5 petitions -- and these are the petitions --
6 over 50 percent of the population of Tioga
7 County. There would have been more signees if
8 we had returned to the meetings, but due to
9 the timing of the constitutional amendment
10 process for an independent citizen's
11 commission, we had to concentrate on that.

12 We presented our data to the Tioga
13 County and neighboring commissioners, state
14 representatives, and senators. We had
15 educational public meetings. We did talk
16 shows -- radio talk shows, wrote letters to
17 the editor, spoke to school classes, had
18 booths at town festivals and held community
19 meetings throughout the county. Hundreds --
20 well thousands -- a hundred -- that should be
21 a hundred thousand-plus people throughout
22 Pennsylvania signed petitions expressing their
23 support of a new process of redistricting.

24 Everyone except for the politicians
25 looked at the maps and listened to the facts

1 and agreed that the process, as written in our
2 constitution, as we're all aware, needs to --
3 resulted in extremely gerrymandered maps.

4 There needed to be more guardrails for drawing
5 the maps or a new process.

6 After we presented our data to our
7 legislators, we heard nothing.

8 In addition, Franklin and Marshall
9 College chose the redistricting question for
10 its prestigious statewide poll in 2019.
11 Independent, Republicans, Democrat, and other
12 registered voters responded to the random
13 survey. And I have this for all of you, if
14 you want it. The results show that
15 Pennsylvania voters are clear that the current
16 redistricting process is designed to maximize
17 party influence, minimize accountability, and
18 reduce competition.

19 72 percent of the respondents said
20 that the current system of drawing legislative
21 districts in Pennsylvania allow party leaders
22 to put party interests ahead of voters'
23 interest. 70 percent said that it created
24 polarization and gridlock. 65 percent said it
25 allowed elected officials to choose their own

1 voters instead of voters choosing their
2 elected officials. 62 percent said it gives
3 voters less choice on election day. And 61
4 said that it prevents voters from holding
5 their representatives accountable.

6 After this data was presented and
7 explained to our legislators, we heard
8 nothing.

9 During this three-year process, there
10 were various chairmen of the Senate and House
11 Government Committee, where, as you know, the
12 bills have to originate and be sponsored
13 before a vote can be taken on the floor.

14 Representative Garth Everett, chair
15 at that time, wrote to me explaining his
16 position, not for an independent citizens
17 commission, but that any group could produce
18 fair, accountable, transparent districts if
19 they were given the appropriate criteria. He
20 had a list of criteria that matched closely
21 with those defined in the position from the
22 grassroots organization Fair Districts PA.
23 However, no bill ever came that expressed his
24 criteria to the House floor for a vote.

25 Senator Argall is an opponent of

1 gerrymandering and has been for a long time.

2 And now, we are in a hearing for
3 congressional redistricting. There is nothing
4 that has been written in a bill or
5 constitutional amendment from this legislative
6 session, with Garth -- Seth Grove as our
7 chairman, that would guide commissions in the
8 next decades -- that should be an S on the end
9 of that. The redistricting commission for the
10 Pennsylvania Senate and House of
11 Representatives is using the same criteria
12 that are currently in our constitution that
13 were so twisted and convoluted in their
14 interpretation in 2011 that we ended up with
15 Goofy kicking Donald, and the national
16 reputation as being one of the most extremely
17 gerrymandered states in the union.

18 Where are the bills or laws that
19 would prevent this situation from happening
20 again?

21 Thank you for having a hearing on
22 this important topic. You have scheduled it,
23 and, you know, here we are. And so, I was
24 looking at a different map. And so, I know
25 that people in the north central district

1 had -- I mean, many of them have, what, three
2 hours or so to drive. So -- but, anyway, we
3 have a meeting. And it was scheduled for
4 4:00 p.m. so anyone who wants to testify need
5 only take off a half-day of work.

6 Having the hearing information only
7 on a partisan website that had incorrect
8 information on it, gave some constituents of
9 Districts 5 and 10 the feeling that the
10 hearing is a token meeting designed to limit
11 their participation. Often we hear and read
12 politicians talking about the will of the
13 people. I have witnessed the will of the
14 people for three years, expressing their
15 legitimate displeasure with the current
16 redistricting process and watched our
17 legislators ignore them. We have no
18 referendum process in Pennsylvania where the
19 true will of the people could be registered.

20 I thank you for providing this
21 opportunity for me to express my experiences
22 and thoughts with you this afternoon. I wish
23 you well in your map drawing and that, in the
24 end, we would judge your process and maps as
25 being accountable, fair, transparent, and

1 responsive to the needs of the citizens of
2 Pennsylvania.

3 There are a lot of people who have
4 been drawing and redrawing really good,
5 non-biased responsive district maps who would
6 be happy to share their maps and their
7 expertise with you: Draw the Lines
8 participants, Fair District PA map drawers,
9 Council of Seventy people, Dave's maps, League
10 of Women Voters and so on.

11 In a democracy, it's important that
12 every voting citizen knows that his or her
13 vote counts.

14 Thank you.

15 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN GROVE: Thank you,
16 Janet. Really appreciate your time this
17 evening and your testimony.

18 All right. Our next testifier is
19 Bryn Hammarstrom. Did I get that right?
20 Registered nurse -- thank you for your
21 service -- from Middlebury Center,
22 Pennsylvania.

23 And when you are comfortable and
24 ready, please begin. And just make sure that
25 little green light is on.

1 MR. HAMMARSTROM: Nobody's turned it
2 off yet.

3 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN GROVE: All right.

4 MR. HAMMARSTROM: I just have a
5 question. Because everything here, House
6 State Government Committee -- and are there
7 any Democratic representatives participating?
8 There is one, okay.

9 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN GROVE: Yeah. And
10 then, Fitzgerald online. This is a bipartisan
11 official House committee.

12 MR. HAMMARSTROM: Okay. That's what
13 this seems to indicate, and yet, when I was
14 making my arrangements, it's -- it all was
15 through House staff offices. And I said,
16 Well, isn't -- I had trouble reaching people
17 at times, but --

18 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN GROVE: Do you want
19 to pull the mic a little closer to you?

20 MR. HAMMARSTROM: Okay. I'll pull
21 up.

22 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN GROVE: Or move in.
23 I just want to make sure we can hear you
24 clearly.

25 MR. HAMMARSTROM: Okay. Thank you.

1 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN GROVE: There you
2 go. And whenever you're ready, please begin.

3 MR. HAMMARSTROM: So, I'd just like
4 to say that -- I'm going to -- I have a real
5 difference in basic opinion and approach than
6 many of the earlier speakers in terms of
7 the -- I recognize the important -- I
8 recognize that intact districts or use of
9 existing political boundaries have advantages
10 for all the reasons that were stated. But I
11 also feel like Janet, that -- the woman who
12 just spoke, Ms. Gyekis, that there are other
13 reasons that may supersede that. And I'll
14 just say, for years, even though I was a
15 Middlebury Center address, I was Chatham
16 Township, so I was in Glenn Thompson's
17 district when all the other people in this
18 county were in the Williamsport district. So,
19 I mean, I've been on the other end of that.

20 And, you know, we're also, where 717
21 used to meet 570 -- I mean 814, so we know
22 we're in an area where we get swung back and
23 forth, because we're not -- we're not a very
24 important place. But, so -- anyway.

25 I'm glad to comment on the

1 congressional redistricting in Pennsylvania.
2 Fair redistricting is critical to the free
3 expression of our right to vote. I also --
4 this is sort of an extra thought, but I also
5 think our Commonwealth should consider rank
6 choice voting, which I think you know is used
7 in Maine for several years and, more recently,
8 in New York City. And I say this particularly
9 in primary elections where, in effect, the
10 winner takes all, i.e. the highest vote, even
11 if only 15 percent, wins the nomination. So,
12 I think, in some ways, it's also more
13 important in a primary where you may have six
14 or eight candidates, than in the general
15 election.

16 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN GROVE: Just to
17 remind you, Bryn, we have to stick on
18 congressional redistricting, because of
19 actually state law, so, just --

20 MR. HAMMARSTROM: Okay.

21 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN GROVE: Yeah. I
22 don't want to have anybody go to jail tonight;
23 right?

24 MR. HAMMARSTROM: Okay.

25 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN GROVE: Thank you.

1 MR. HAMMARSTROM: So, I've changed my
2 opinion on redistricting as I've grown older.
3 When young, I thought it important that all
4 opinions be represented in a legislature or
5 congress or senate. But after decades of
6 increasingly partisan governmental gridlock,
7 due in part to fringe candidates winning
8 winner-take-all primaries in districts with
9 one party dominance, I have changed my mind.
10 I now support balanced districts, in which the
11 swing voter, instead of the partisan one,
12 determines the winner. I believe this
13 strengthens the middle, increasing compromise
14 and consensus, allowing for functional
15 government of, by, and for the people.

16 Our nation's mostly rural Trump
17 phenomenon, in which a strong core of the
18 majority party, but not necessarily a majority
19 of the district's voters, won an election, and
20 that has always been true. But if multiple
21 candidates are competing, a runoff for rank
22 choice voting should be -- okay. Sorry.

23 This means I support congressional
24 district boundaries that intentionally include
25 diversity -- and I'm adding "party" here, I

1 didn't write that in -- in party, race, and
2 class, rather than a homogeneous population.
3 There's some -- I'm sure some of the gentlemen
4 that testified earlier would disagree, but,
5 congress really does not decide local issues,
6 so to speak. So, intact local political
7 jurisdictions should not take precedence over
8 achieving diversity.

9 Drawing congressional districts after
10 each ten-year census should be done by
11 political scientists, not politicians. As
12 some editorial writers have expressed it:
13 Voters should pick their politicians, but
14 politicians should not pick their voters.

15 State by state, lines should be drawn
16 that allocate voters to most districts in a
17 very rough approximation of the parties'
18 strength statewide, while recognizing, for
19 example, Republican strength in rural areas
20 and Democratic strength in cities. The
21 exception I would make to this general rule
22 would be to recognize historic
23 underrepresentation of minority groups in our
24 congressional and legislative system, allowing
25 a few districts to have to a majority-minority

1 population to ensure their presence in
2 congress.

3 Pennsylvania's constitution
4 guarantees fair congressional districts, and I
5 trust that will continue in the future, thanks
6 to our state supreme court, which overturned
7 grossly unfair, partisan gerrymandering by the
8 Republican party after the 2010 census. That
9 2011 gerrymander gave the Republicans a
10 thirteen-to-five majority of our delegation in
11 the House of Representatives. But after the
12 state supreme court correction, our delegation
13 now more fairly represents our partisan divide
14 at nine to nine.

15 Thank you.

16 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN GROVE: Thank you,
17 Bryn, so much. Greatly appreciate your time
18 this evening and your willingness to come
19 testify.

20 Our next testifier is Amy Shields,
21 executive director, Allegheny Hardwood
22 Utilization Group, from Kane, Pennsylvania.

23 And, Amy, thank you so much for
24 taking time out of your busy schedule to come
25 testify. And the floor is yours, when you're

1 comfortable and ready, and just make sure the
2 green light's on.

3 MS. SHIELDS: All right.

4 Chairman Grove and members of the
5 House State Government Committee, let me begin
6 by commending you for holding these hearings
7 as a means of providing transparency into the
8 redistricting process and for reaching out to
9 the various regions of the state in order to
10 gain perspective on the operations and
11 legislative needs of our companies and our
12 citizens.

13 I greatly appreciate the opportunity
14 to testify before your committee this
15 afternoon and offer my comments with no
16 political agenda but solely as an effort to
17 describe the geographic importance of the
18 north central region of the state as a
19 community of interest that shares a common
20 identity as the beginning of Pennsylvania's
21 forest products supply chain.

22 My name is Amy Shields. I'm a
23 lifelong resident of Elk County and the
24 executive director of the Allegheny Hardwood
25 Utilization Group, or AHUG. Sorry to restate

1 that.

2 AHUG is a nonprofit organization
3 formed in 1984 for the purpose of promoting
4 the long-term economic growth and development
5 of the hardwood industry and associated
6 ancillary operations within the fourteen
7 counties of northwest and north central
8 Pennsylvania. In accomplishing this mission,
9 AHUG focuses its efforts on industry workforce
10 development and training, promotion of
11 hardwood manufacturing and products, public
12 education, support for hardwood research and
13 development, and the furthering of sustainable
14 science-based management of the region's
15 natural resource assets.

16 Prior to assuming the role of AHUG
17 executive director, I spent nearly thirty
18 years in private industry, owning and managing
19 hardwood sawmills across the state, with the
20 principal location being in Elk County.

21 With nearly seventeen million acres
22 of forestland and a business presence in every
23 one of the Commonwealth's sixty-seven
24 counties, Pennsylvania is the number one
25 producer of hardwood products in the United

1 States. Our hardwood industry employs nearly
2 63,000 individuals in more than 2,100
3 operations statewide, representing
4 approximately 10 percent of Pennsylvania's
5 manufacturing workforce and providing over 36
6 billion dollars a year in total economic
7 impact to our state's economy.

8 While these are impressive
9 statistics, a glance at a topographic map of
10 Pennsylvania will provide insight into how the
11 primary and secondary manufacturing sectors of
12 our industry are dispersed across the state
13 and while Pennsylvania's north central region
14 has a unique identity.

15 The counties that comprise the north
16 central region are among the most heavily
17 forested in the state. In fact, our region is
18 home to some of the highest quality hardwood
19 forests in the world, making north central the
20 beginning of the hardwood supply chain in
21 Pennsylvania.

22 Our region includes those individuals
23 and companies who own and manage vast acres of
24 forestland, who harvest and haul thousands of
25 truckloads of logs and pulpwood from those

1 acre, who produce and sell millions of board
2 feet of logs and lumber, and who utilize those
3 products and their residuals in the production
4 of paper, packaging, home heating materials,
5 furniture, and flooring components and other
6 products.

7 Some of the largest private land
8 holdings in the state are located in the north
9 central region and are owned by hardwood
10 companies and timber investment management
11 organizations, or TIMOs. The largest
12 concentration of consulting foresters, logging
13 professionals, and independent hardwood
14 trucking companies can be found in northwest
15 and north central PA, along with numerous
16 hardwood sawmills, including several of the
17 highest producing and most technologically
18 advanced operations in the country.

19 The north central region is home to
20 one of only two existing paper manufacturing
21 facilities left in Pennsylvania, as well as a
22 global manufacturing -- packaging
23 manufacturer, railroad tie, and shipping
24 pallet producers, and several wood pallet and
25 wood component, panel producers.

1 While there are also secondary
2 manufactures in the region who produce solid
3 wood flooring, furniture and the like, the
4 primary productfurnitureor is the predominant
5 presence within the north central region. Our
6 companies share similar concerns in regard to
7 forest health, access to raw materials,
8 environmental issues and sustainability, trade
9 policy, workforce and labor, infrastructure
10 needs, and on and on. Having the ability to
11 speak to our legislative representatives with
12 a singular voice, and for them to understand
13 who and what we are through the singular
14 reference to north central Pennsylvania's
15 hardwood industry is critical.

16 That the north central region
17 continue to include Jefferson and Clearfield
18 counties is important, as Interstate 80 is the
19 key to the survival of the sawmill and
20 residual product producers in our region. We
21 must continue to have a voice in that
22 conversation.

23 While there are numerous private
24 forest landowners within the north central
25 region, there is also a great deal of public

1 land under both federal and state ownership.
2 Our companies and citizens must maintain their
3 ability to have a united voice in that
4 conversation.

5 As energy, trade, and environmental
6 policies evolve, the hardwood companies and
7 citizens of the north central region must
8 maintain their ability to communicate with
9 their legislative representatives as one.
10 Congressional district maps define our
11 regions. They shape the manner in which we
12 are represented. And they greatly impact the
13 ability of organizations like mine to work
14 effectively on behalf of the men and women
15 whose livelihoods depend upon Pennsylvania's
16 working forests.

17 Forest products are an agricultural
18 resource, and we are proud to be counted among
19 Pennsylvania's ag sector. Currently, the
20 member of the congress representing most of
21 north central Pennsylvania is the ranking
22 member of the US House Committee on
23 Agriculture, a post that has traditionally
24 been held by individuals from western and
25 midwestern states. That our region of

1 Pennsylvania has produced a representative who
2 has focused so heavily on agricultural issues,
3 including silviculture and forestry, and
4 achieved a key leadership role speaks to the
5 importance of our industry as a regional
6 community of interest. When our region seeks
7 to be heard in Washington D.C., we speak with
8 a common identity, characterized by our rural
9 communities that depend on our proximity to
10 Pennsylvania's working forests.

11 We respectfully urge you to consider
12 these dynamics as you craft your congressional
13 district maps based on updated population
14 numbers for the upcoming decade.

15 Once again, I thank you for your
16 time, and I appreciate the opportunity to
17 represent the hardwood industry of north
18 central Pennsylvania in today's testimony.

19 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN GROVE: Thank you
20 so much, Amy. Really appreciate your time and
21 your willingness to testify this evening.

22 Our last testifier will be James Van
23 Blarcom, Sugar Branch Farms, Columbia Cross
24 Roads, Pennsylvania.

25 And, James, thank you so much for

1 coming and your participation this evening.
2 When you're comfortable and ready, and I
3 assume the green light is still on, so,
4 whenever you're ready, sir, go ahead.

5 MR. VAN BLARCOM: My name is James
6 Van Blarcom. I'm not an expert on
7 redistricting, but I know a fair amount of the
8 northern tier's ag.

9 Thank you for having me here today,
10 and recognizing the needs of the northern tier
11 of Pennsylvania. I'm a dairy and crop farmer
12 from Bradford County. I've farmed forty-seven
13 years as a dairy farmer and now also as a hog
14 and crop farmer. We employ over twenty
15 full-time employees in the dairy and another
16 twenty through the hog facilities. I farm
17 with two son-in-laws, one in the dairy and one
18 in the crops. Our family hosts an annual corn
19 maze for the community as well as a produce
20 stand and a greenhouse.

21 I spent many years serving under
22 local farm bureau board and leadership
23 positions. I spent twenty-six years as
24 Bradford County Conservation District board,
25 also serving as president in those years.

1 Currently, I serve as a board member of the
2 Pennsylvania Milk Marketing Board.

3 Our farm is consistently feeding and
4 entertaining a lot of people through our daily
5 farm activities, recreational opportunities
6 like corn mazes and hunting. From employment,
7 insurance, hunting laws, road maintenance and
8 preparation, taxes to immigration issues and
9 environmental regulations, our farm is
10 involved in many aspects of government.

11 We are still a family farm, farms
12 which are critical to the health of
13 Pennsylvania dairy industry, but equally as
14 important to the aesthetics of the northern
15 tier. As travelers come to hunt and visit the
16 area, they want to see farms as well as
17 hunting opportunities. Therefore, it's
18 critical that we have good representation at
19 the state and federal government level. This
20 representation needs to be from the area, as
21 well from -- as well as know the area's needs
22 very well. Due to our rural nature of -- of
23 the previous areas mentioned, our needs differ
24 from the rest of the state and nation.

25 One area of recent concern is the

1 streambed cleanup and restoration of our
2 roads. Northern tier has seen a significant
3 increase in flooding in the last few years,
4 and our rural roads and creeks need major
5 repair. Our needs are different, as we travel
6 these roads with large farm equipment and
7 trucks to get to the fields in areas that are
8 not commonly traveled but critical to use for
9 the farms and services.

10 DEP, EPA, Army Corps of Engineers,
11 and FEMA do not at all understand the
12 difference of our glacial soils and gravel
13 when cleanups are needed.

14 Due to the regulators' current
15 standards, just this summer, people lost their
16 homes and their lives were destroyed because
17 regulators have been unable to see the needs
18 of the area and how to accommodate appropriate
19 care and maintenance to our streams.
20 Therefore, it's critical to have local
21 representation to inform regulators of our
22 needs.

23 It's important to note that the
24 people making decisions on district lines need
25 to be from their respective areas. We should

1 not have a judge or someone deciding these
2 areas who lives in another part of the state.
3 Therefore, the best choice for the decision
4 making is within the House of Representatives,
5 our elected officials from each region of the
6 state.

7 In conclusion, our current district
8 line makes sense. West of here is primarily
9 forest and recreation. East of Tioga is 50
10 percent forests and 50 percent agriculture and
11 recreation. Both areas contribute heavily to
12 the traditions of -- to the hunting traditions
13 of Pennsylvania. North central PA produces a
14 lot of fiber, food, and lumber that is not
15 consumed in the area. And that makes us an
16 important part of the Pennsylvania economy.
17 We need good representation.

18 And thank you for the opportunity to
19 speak with you.

20 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN GROVE: James,
21 thank you so much for your time this evening.
22 We greatly appreciate your testimony as we
23 move forward with making congressional maps.
24 So, thank you so much.

25 That was our last testifier. Any

1 closing comments, Chairman Conklin?

2 MINORITY CHAIRMAN CONKLIN: As
3 always, I want to thank the individuals who
4 came out because this really is your
5 government and your input is very important to
6 us. Thank you.

7 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN GROVE: Thank you
8 to our testifiers for your input on the impact
9 the redistricting process has on your
10 community. I would also thank the members in
11 attendance today as well as our hosts,
12 Representative Owlett and the Wellsboro fire
13 department.

14 I hope it is evident the House of
15 Representatives is committed to undertaking
16 the most open, transparent, and accountable
17 redistricting process in Pennsylvania history.
18 We believe that transparency and
19 accountability form the bedrock of good
20 governance, and public input through these
21 hearings plays an essential role in that.

22 We look forward to continuing this
23 public process in the south central region
24 tomorrow, and in other regions of the
25 Commonwealth in the coming months. I invite

1 those in attendance or viewing at home today
2 to follow those hearings as well.

3 With that, we are adjourned.

4 (Whereupon, the hearing concluded at
5 5:05 p.m.)

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REPORTER'S CERTIFICATE

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the foregoing
is a true and accurate transcript, to the best
of my ability, produced from audio on the said
proceedings.

BRENDA J. PARDUN, RPR
Court Reporter
Notary Public

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