

Testimony of Bryn Hammarstrom, RN (Northcentral Regional Hearing)

-I am glad to comment on Congressional Redistricting in Pennsylvania. Fair redistricting is critical to the 'free expression' of our right to vote. I also think our Commonwealth should consider 'ranked choice voting', particularly in primary elections where (in effect) the 'winner takes all' (i.e. the highest vote, even if only 15%, wins their party's nomination).

-I have changed my opinion on redistricting as I've grown older. When young I thought it important that all opinions be represented in the Legislature. But after decades of increasingly partisan governmental gridlock, due in part to fringe candidates winning 'winner take all' primaries in districts with one-party dominance, I have changed my mind.

-I now support 'balanced' districts, in which the 'swing voter', instead of the partisan one, determines the winner. I believe this strengthens the middle, increasing compromise and consensus, allowing for functional government of, by, and for the people.

-This means I support congressional district boundaries that intentionally include diversity in race and class, rather than a homogeneous population. Congress does not decide local issues, so 'intact' local political jurisdictions should not take precedence over achieving diversity.

-Drawing congressional districts after each ten-year census should be done by political scientists, not politicians. As some editorial writers have expressed it: "Voters should pick their politicians, but politicians should not pick their voters." State by state, lines should be drawn that allocate voters to most districts in a very rough approximation of the parties' strength statewide, while recognizing, for example, Republican strength in rural areas and Democratic strength in cities.

-The exception I would make to the general rule would be to recognize historic under-representation of minority groups, allowing a few districts to have a 'majority minority' population to ensure their presence in Congress.

-Thanks to Pennsylvania's Constitution, we are guaranteed free and fair Congressional Districts, and I trust that will continue in the future.