

**Testimony of Malcolm L. Derk
Government Affairs Committee Chair
Greater Susquehanna Valley Chamber of Commerce**

State Government Committee Hearing
Congressional Redistricting
Wellsboro, PA
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On behalf of the Greater Susquehanna Valley Chamber of Commerce (GSVCC), please accept our gratitude for the opportunity to share testimony with the State Government Committee. Thank you to the members of the committee, and particularly the Chairs of the Committee, Representative Seth Grove and Representative Scott Conklin. I appreciate the committee taking the time to conduct these hearings on Congressional Redistricting. It is my hope that the testimony I share with you today provides helpful information as you begin the important work of Congressional Redistricting.

My name is Malcolm Derk, I am the Chair of the Government Affairs Committee of the Greater Susquehanna Valley Chamber of Commerce. The testimony I share today is the result of several listening sessions with our committee as our members expressed various concerns and opinions pertaining to Congressional Redistricting. The views do not reflect the views of my employer or our leadership team, but the consensus of the Greater Susquehanna Valley Chamber of Commerce members that participated in our listening sessions. We hope that you find these comments and experiences of our members to be useful as you move ahead.

We appreciate the monumental task that this committee has as you consider new Congressional Districts as a result of the most recent United States Census. Pennsylvania will lose one seat in Congress and each remaining district must gain additional land area and population to account for population changes. You have a challenging task as you seek to draw fair and representative districts.

As you move forward with this important work, members of the Greater Susquehanna Valley Chamber ask that you consider these three overarching points.

1. Natural travel patterns,
2. Communities of interest, and
3. Recognizable boundaries (boundaries that are familiar to residents and easily distinguishable for voters).

Travel patterns in the region take advantage of highway and road systems that tie our communities together. In my home community, the Chamber of Commerce's regional footprint, bridges and roadways connect Snyder, Union, Northumberland, and Montour Counties. The

bridges over the Susquehanna River provide ample connections that allow our region to have a unified feel. We live, work, recreate, and engage in commerce based on the ease by which we are able to travel. Along the 11/15 corridor in Snyder County, a large number of retail establishments, restaurants, lodging options, and grocery stores are located in Selinsgrove, Shamokin Dam, and Monroe Township. These amenities draw neighbors from a large radius to shop and dine.

In areas where natural travel patterns are constrained by a lack of connecting infrastructure, it makes it very difficult for those regions to build communities of interest. We are thankful that in the Chamber's region, we have a reliable system of transportation infrastructure that supports travel patterns that bind the region together, particularly Snyder, Union, Northumberland, Montour Counties. More and more the travel patterns we see among our Chamber members include strong connections to Lycoming and Columbia County as well. These connections will only grow with the completion of the Central Susquehanna Valley Thruway that provides connections to Interstate 80.

Our large employers, such as the major health systems of Geisinger and UPMC provide jobs that pull employees from a multi-county region that includes Lycoming, Columbia, Montour, Union, Snyder, and Northumberland Counties. Educational institutions like, Bucknell and Susquehanna Universities, and wood products and agricultural businesses, each pull large numbers of employees to fill the variety of positions necessary to thrive.

These employers require a skilled workforce from a multi-county region. Jobs that require experience, advanced training, and education recruit employees from beyond one municipality or county. The entire area sees individuals traveling within an hour's drive between work and home. The transportation infrastructure allows for employees to choose from among a 4-6 county region to live and work.

While not a watershed in the traditional sense, we see the transportation corridors creating communities of interest similar to the way streams, creeks, and rivers create a watershed. Rather than a watershed, we might say these jobsheds or employment sheds create another aspect of a community of interest through natural travel patterns. We ask that the committee consider these flows of people for work and commerce as you engage in establishing new Congressional Districts. I am certain that each of you see similar movement and community cohesion in your own districts created by travel patterns.

In our rural region, it is not uncommon for many of our neighbors to commute to other counties or travel 30 minutes to an hour for employment. Such a commute in an urban area may mean traveling within a few miles, but in our rural community such travel times translate into 30-50 miles.

Communities of interest are also created by the ways we collaborate with neighbors. In Snyder, Union, and Northern Northumberland County, the region established the Central Susquehanna Regional 911 system. This three-county collaboration shows how small rural counties can work together to improve efficiency, reliability, cost, and improved scale. The 911 system also partners with several other counties in using a shared phone systems and other technology to

reduce duplication and improve service. Union and Snyder County partner on other social services, such as Rabbit Transit, a joint Community Action Agency, and Agency on Aging. The Counties of Snyder, Union, and Northumberland are often referred to as the SUN counties as they form partnerships and additional community. Other social and non-profit organizations also function in a multi-county way. The Greater Susquehanna Valley United Way, Red Cross, and Susquehanna Valley Visitors Bureau all share a regional approach. Grouping these collaborating communities together in a Congressional District reflects a common community of interest.

Communities of interest are also created by media coverage. The Chamber has several regional newspapers and other media providers that offer quality reporting. *The Daily Item*, for example, covers the Counties of Snyder, Union, Northumberland, and Montour. 1070AM WKOK provides coverage of local events and offers a talk show Monday through Friday covering local news. These media assets help inform the public regarding their government and decisions of elected officials. We are fortunate that these media markets closely align with the current Congressional District and our Chamber region, helping our members and fellow citizens receive current and transparent information is important in considering District lines. These media groups create affinity in a region as we seek to be an informed populace. We should not underestimate the importance of regional media in creating communities of interest. It is important for the public to know their elected officials and what their government is doing for them in a transparent and informative way.

I would like to dedicate the final portion of this testimony to the importance of maintaining, whenever possible, recognizable municipal boundaries. Keeping an entire county within the same congressional district helps to avoid confusion among voters and provides for ease in recognizing districts. Keeping Counties whole should be a goal whenever possible.

We realize that populations make this difficult in some instances. We humbly request that where an entire county may not be able to be kept whole, that other recognizable political subdivisions be used to help maintain communities of interest. For example, if a county is split into two congressional districts, the committee may consider drawing the map in terms of keeping an entire school district together. It is our hope that whenever possible, counties, school districts, townships, boroughs, and cities be kept whole. As our members or neighbors ask about how to contact their member of Congress, it is helpful if entire communities are kept together to avoid confusion at the ballot box or as citizens seek constituent services from their legislator. Please keep municipalities and communities of interest whole as much as possible.

Thank you again for your time and interest in creating fair Congressional Districts that consider the ways in which communities of interest, travel patterns, municipal boundaries, and collaboration across local governments are given due consideration.

Thank you.