

The House State Government Committee PA Congressional Redistricting Testimony provided by Alan Hall, Susquehanna County Commissioner October 18, 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to come before you today and share the concerns that Susquehanna County has with redistricting. As a third term County Commissioner I can strongly say that one shoe does not fit all, and that one shoe can be very devastating to many, let me explain.

Size Matters

When you look at the northeast region of twelve Counties, the population comparison is staggering. Susquehanna County has a population of approximately 40,000. Luzerne County has 317,000 and Lackawanna has 210,000. Either of those Counties have more population than six of the other Counties combined. If we are talking about fair districting, that also applies to the ability of each of the twelve Counties to have the opportunity in a fair market to put forth a qualified candidate for an office, and that candidate having a level playing field to succeed. A six to one disadvantage does not give rural Counties a fair opportunity.

We Have Seen It Before

Susquehanna County being incorporated into Lackawanna County for congressional redistricting will be disastrous because of the social and economic demographics as each County is unique and different. This example already exists as Susquehanna County is part of region 4 of Penn Dot, headquartered out of Dunmore in Lackawanna County. Over the years we have seen much needed resources reprioritized to the larger metropolitan areas of Scranton and Wilkes-Barre. The roads in Susquehanna County have suffered greatly and are very subpar, and actually if not for the gas companies, more of our roads would be impassable. Our neighbors to the west Bradford, Tioga, Sullivan, and Lycoming are all grouped in region 3. This group does not have the large metropolitan areas absorbing all the resources and are performing well.

Economic Development

Susquehanna County is with the northern tier, as part of the Northern Tier Regional Planning & Development Commission representing Tioga, Bradford, Sullivan, Wyoming, and Susquehanna Counties. NTRD provides resources to help businesses and entrepreneurs, local governments, non-profits, and job seekers to meet the challenges to be successful in Pennsylvania. In addition, Susquehanna County contracts with the Progress Authority which is an economic development company that serves Susquehanna and Bradford County. The Progress Authority focuses on projects that involve industrial development, small business development, business financing, public infrastructure, site prep, and marketing. Redistricting our County with a large metropolitan area would jeopardize all of these programs.

Gas Industry

On any given day Susquehanna County is the number one producing dry gas County in Pennsylvania if not in the Country. Susquehanna County along with Tioga, Bradford, Sullivan, Wyoming, and Lycoming represent the entire northeast Marcellus region, and are all rural Counties with no large metropolitan areas. It's important for these rural Counties to stay together, as only they understand the hardships and requirements for the gas industry. This industry is like no other and is very unique in

nature. Understanding this industry goes far beyond what most can imagine. Even the industry when it came to our area had to learn a lot about our County from our road construction to even the ground formation. As Susquehanna County knows little about the coal mines in Lackawanna County the same is true with Lackawanna County understanding the gas industry in Susquehanna County. This is why the rural counties with the gas industries need to stay together with other rural Counties as only they can understand their needs.

Summary

Again, thank you for the opportunity to come before you today and provide this testimony. Your job with redistricting in a good year is difficult, and the task ahead is very difficult. As I started with size matters, one needs to question the census. In our County they showed up 3 months late to start the process and at the last count, we had the County average response around 60 percent. Now we are told it was in the upper nineties and with a decline in population. Real estate sales were high during the end of 2020 with very low market inventory, the numbers do not add up. Combining with large Counties with large metropolitan areas provides a disservice not only to the rural Counties but also to the large metropolitan areas. Each have different needs for social and economic programs and only they understand their needs. The differences even go down to parks, trails, storm water, manure management, roads, schools, senior services, and housing to mention a few. We always look at how we can provide the best services to our regions. When all of the areas that we represent have commonality, we become well educated in the needs and represent well. It's important to focus on the commonalities such as rural Counties and those with natural gas development to be together. In addition, large Counties with metropolitan areas can best be represented by someone focusing on their issues and concerns.

Thank You
Alan Hall
Susquehanna County Commissioner