

Testimony of Angel Figueroa (Southeast Regional Hearing)

Hello. My name is Angel Figueroa I am a resident of Berks County PA where my wife Isamac Torres-Figueroa and I have decided to raise our family. Isamac is currently the Chairwoman of the Berks County Latino Chamber of Commerce and in her professional capacity she works for the Kutztown University SBDC helping new and existing entrepreneurs. I tell you this so you can see that our family is fully vested in making sure our communities move forward.

As a former veteran of the PA Army National Guard I learned early on in my career that service to the country is one of my core values hence why I am employed by I-LEAD Inc., a non for profit located in Southeast PA helping underserved communities to seek the resources and skills to get out of poverty. As a former elected official, I want to thank all of you for your service, especially thanks to Chairman Grove and committee members for this opportunity.

The 7-counties which we are focused on in this hearing is home to nearly 1/3rd of Pennsylvania's total population, which translates to 5 congressional districts. The 7-county region is the fastest growing region, with a population increase of 5.3%, versus 2.4% for the state overall. Moreover, Allentown and Reading are 2 of the state's 5 largest cities.

The map below shows population changes by region over the last 2 decades and shows the strong 2-decades of growth in the Southeast versus other regions.

This 7-county region is also multicultural, with 29% counting as "minority. It is home to 406,000 Hispanics, or 39% of the state's growing Hispanic population. The Hispanic population is up 48% in this 7-county region, the Black population is up 7%, and the White population dropped -4%.

I'd like to propose 2 districts that would include Berks, Lehigh and Northampton Counties. These districts are included in the map of 17 congressional districts for the whole state that is suggested.

Here is a link to the detailed map on Dave's Redistricting App.

<https://davesredistricting.org/join/47c5c0a6-3c7d-4d46-ad22-1ccd336b77cb>

First, looking at Berks, Lehigh and Northampton counties which are in yellow and teal, there is a northern tier in yellow which is mostly rural, racially White, and declining in population. That region is similar to the counties to the north (Schuylkill, Carbon, Monroe) so the northern tier of Berks, Lehigh and Northampton counties is included with those neighboring counties to create the district in yellow on the map.

The second region and district I've drawn in teal, is the one we want to particularly focus on today. It represents the southern tier of Berks, Lehigh and Northampton counties. This district is a growing urban, suburban, industrial, corridor including Easton, Bethlehem, Allentown and Reading in southwestern Berks County. Along this well-traveled corridor, you'll find the world headquarters of Air Products, PPL, and Crayola as well as Mac Trucks, Braun and 700 manufacturing companies, and a fast-growing warehouse industry including Amazon. This urban corridor is connected by Interstate 78 and route 22/222, which are very crowded highways. ABE international airport is in this region. Amtrak is planning to expand passenger lines to Allentown and Reading which will also fuel growth and the accompanying increase in demand for improved systems to support the region. It is important to the

state that this growth be sustained. Excellent universities and colleges such as Lehigh, Muhlenberg and Lafayette are located here.

This district is also home to a large and growing Hispanic population. It represents over 70% of Reading, over 50% of Allentown, and over 30% of Bethlehem. The Latino community calls it “Corozon de la comunidad.” Described in the article linked here: <https://www.palatinconvention.com/impact>

Here are two links to articles in the regional newspaper, the Morning Call, which speaks to this growth. <https://www.mcall.com/news/local/mc-nws-demographic-changes-lehigh-valley-municipalities-20210816-kxzwdirrsbecdpa6r6drbcq2ka-story.html>

<https://www.mcall.com/news/breaking/mc-nws-census-2020-new-data-release-20210812-jajtkqc7u5c35mzfmdy7q6af5a-story.html>

In this congressional district, Hispanics would represent 28% of total population, and Blacks would represent 11%. Given the concentration and growth of the Hispanic population in the Southeast region, this is a very important district. Keeping these Hispanic communities united in one district protects their interests. Having a congressional representative focused on the changing needs of this vibrant region over the next 10 years is the right thing to do.

In summary, population growth and population decline, both present policy challenges, but they are different challenges with different solutions. For example, population growth, particularly in the 222 corridor in Northampton, Lehigh, Berks Counties brings commensurate challenges of strained infrastructure, education and services, including the need for workforce development.

I’d like to ask the State Government Committees to introduce a map that will provide a congressional district support to serve the interests of each of these distinctly different areas.

One way to ensure that continues going forward is to have voting districts that represent the interests of the urban parts of the region very well, and also have districts that will represent the rural regions well. The interests are different, but well drawn districts will enable voters to elect the candidates that will truly represent their interests. If we don’t, we risk having districts that are highly polarized which I believe tends to paralyze progress on important issues, and angers constituents.

I look forward to seeing the preliminary Congressional map that the State Government Committee proposes and to the future hearings to comment on that map.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify today.