

Testimony of Marian Levine (Southeast Regional Hearing)

My name is Marian Levine. I live in Merion Station, in Montgomery County, one mile west of the Philadelphia city line and have been here for 35 years. I have voted in every election, including primaries, since I turned 21 (the then minimum age to vote), and I taught my kids to vote regularly, too. The issue of drawing up districts is important to me because the division of Pennsylvania (and other states) into districts is fundamental to our entire democracy. I am a former teacher of United States and Pennsylvania history and civics. I care about this stuff. I taught about how a democracy is supposed to work both from the point of view of electing people and representing them. It should be a transparent process - you and your community elect a representative. Your community is your township, borough, city, county, state, depending on the level of government. The composition of your district makes sense, usually based on geographic features or political boundaries and equal in population to the others. People need to see that their representative is speaking for them and their community.

District lines should not be drawn just for the sake of party politics. Once that's done, there's little opportunity for voter input on issues. Then parties rule - not the people - and the parties tell the representatives what to support or block. That's not only the end of democracy, it's the end of government. There's no incentive for parties to work together. People lose faith in their government.

We can see this just by looking at how dysfunctional government has become. At this time, we can see that the public has lost confidence in the ability of our government - at all levels - to move forward in any direction. Neither party wants to let the other take credit for any achievement and so there's a stalemate: the public suffers. Nothing gets done - look no further than a Congress that cannot pass budget bills and can't even pass a resolution to allow borrowing for more than a month. Neither the State nor Congress even considers long term solutions to big problems. Everything suffers. Individual people, the operation of government itself, national and Commonwealth infrastructure, our national reputation. What people learn - and say - is government can't be counted on, it doesn't do anything good, it doesn't do anything at all.

I have looked at the current maps of PA State House and Senate and US Congressional districts where I live. I'm an intelligent grownup. If I can't make much sense out of the maps, I'm not sure others can either. I live in what through 2010 was the 7th Congressional district. It ran from here in a narrow band all the way to Chester and Lancaster Counties and included only part of my township, Lower Merion. After redistricting, I was in the 2nd, a predominantly Philadelphia district, again dividing Lower Merion. As of 2018 I am in the 5th, a predominantly Delaware County district. Interestingly, almost all of Montgomery County - except for my corner of it and part of Lower Merion - is in the 4th district. Why would any of my representatives care about us in Lower Merion or Montgomery County?

I respectfully urge you to draw district lines in which:

The populations are equal.

Districts are contiguous.

Districts are as compact as possible without dividing municipalities such as townships, boroughs and counties (unless they are too large for one district).

The districts fairly represent their constituents (rather than the districts drawn by choosing their constituents).

Divisions are not formed for the purpose of "wasting" a portion of their constituents' votes.

Let us restore confidence in our government "of the people, by the people and for the people!"