

Testimony of Susan Hancock (Southeast Regional Hearing)

Good Afternoon Rep Grove and members of the House State Government Committee. My name is Susan Hancock. I have been a resident of Chester County for 31 years with my husband Tim. We have raised 3 daughters here, all of whom are now married, and we are enjoying 11 grandchildren. I am here today to express my concerns about the current PA 6th Congressional District. The district includes all of Chester County, along with a part of Berks County jutting out of Chester County. The part of Berks County is just large enough to bring in the City of Reading.

I would like the committee to consider redrawing the district in a way that is more sensible. In researching the guidelines for reapportionment, I found four key points according to the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) as well as the PA constitution, Article II, Section 16.

1. Contiguity – Bordering or being in direct contact with something. Chester County borders 4 PA counties – Delaware, Montgomery, Berks, and Lancaster counties. Looking at a map of Chester County and its neighbors, the smallest common border is with Berks County. Both Montgomery and Delaware county borders are longer, and our shared border with Lancaster County is much longer.
2. Compactness - Constituents of a congressional district should live as near to each other as reasonably possible. It takes over an hour to drive from most of Chester County to Reading which is not the most compact area.
3. Preservation of political subdivisions – Ideally counties, cities, towns, and boroughs should be kept together in congressional districts. While it is possible to keep cities, towns, and boroughs together in a district, due to the need for each district to be the same population size, it is not possible to keep all counties together. We should expect that some Counties will have to be split into more than one district.
4. Communities of interest – Common political, social, or economic interests. Reading is more industrial than Chester County. Reading is a large city with over 90,000 residents. Chester County's county seat is West Chester, with only 18,461 residents. It seems odd that in a district that contains all of Chester County with a small part of Berks, the city of Reading is the largest and most dominant municipality from a population perspective. Chester County is a collar county of Philadelphia, while Berks is not.

Based on these four points, it seems that combining Chester County with part of Berks County, especially including the City of Reading, does not have much in the way of contiguity, compactness, or shared communities of interest.

According to the 2020 census, PA has a lower population than the previous census and as a result will lose one congressional district, making each of the other districts slightly larger. Outside of Philadelphia, Montgomery County is the only county large enough to be its own district. It is obvious that some counties will have to be divided and combined with other counties. With that being established, there is a need to find sections of counties that have contiguity, compactness, and communities of interest. Lancaster and Chester Counties have the largest area of contiguity. Adding a section of Lancaster County to Chester County or a section of Chester County to Lancaster County would have compactness. Residents of both counties cross the county border daily for many reasons including jobs, commerce, and going to church. Both counties have large agricultural communities, including plain people communities. Lancaster General Health Services has locations in both counties, and recently became affiliated with Chester County Hospital and the Penn Medicine system. Lancaster and Chester counties share many communities of interest, much more so than Chester and Berks.

To further underline the lack of common communities of interest, it is worth noting that Reading-based Tower Health purchased several hospitals in Chester County a few years ago. The business model was supposed to funnel patients with serious medical needs from the outlying hospitals to the flagship Reading Hospital. Two weeks ago, Tower Health announced they were closing or selling these Chester County hospitals. Part of the reason is that the hospitals are located in Chester County communities that have no historical relationship with the City of Reading. Patients with serious medical issues do not want to go to Reading, they want to go to Chester County Hospital in West Chester.

Reapportioning congressional districts using the aforementioned guidelines is sensible and promotes unity among residents of all political persuasions. It is important to reapportion in a way that can be accepted by both political parties and signed by the governor, without being dictated by the PA Supreme court.

I would like my children and grandchildren to live in a PA that is peaceful and free. Thank you for your time and consideration of this matter.