



**PHILADELPHIA**  
REGIONAL HEARING

## Philadelphia Regional Hearing

### Written testimony (as of 10/13/21) submitted by:

1. **Fern H.**  
Philadelphia, PA

It is difficult, as an average citizen, to understand the complicated PA redistricting process. Short videos are hardly a comprehensive resource. Before hearings are held and testimonies are prepared, there needs to be education about the process. The upshot is for voices of historically marginalized groups -- such as the poor and people of color -- be considered as maps are redrawn.

2. **Douglas G.**  
Philadelphia, PA

Dear Chairman Grove, other members of the State Government Committee, and staff,

Here are my comments on the current congressional map, as created by the Supreme Court in 2018:

(1) It is much better than the previous, heavily gerrymandered map.

(2) In my city, Philadelphia, it looks quite good. I'm not sure why the southwestern border of District 3 is jagged around 52nd Street and Greenway, but I doubt there's much harm in that. The main division in the heart of the city, the north-south border along Broad Street between Districts 2 and 3, seems reasonable to me. Most of Philadelphia's self-identified neighborhoods lie either east or west of Broad. The African American community in North Philly is split by this line, but there's probably enough of the community in both Districts 2 and 3 to have a strong impact. (And packing most African Americans into a single district would likely be worse.) The Hispanic and Chinese communities, both primarily east of Broad, are not split.

(3) I want to stress that good redistricting needs to balance many elements, some of which are opposed to one another. Besides being contiguous and roughly equal in population, the maps should minimize county and municipal splits, maximize compactness, keep communities of interest together, and ensure that racial and language minorities have fair representation. A map that rates high on one factor may be low on another, so the outcome needs to be balanced.

(4) Because tough choices need to be made to balance multiple goods, the rationale and values behind any map should be explained clearly to the public. Public trust would also be enhanced if the identity of the mapmaker(s) were disclosed. Maps prepared in secret automatically earn distrust.

(5) Though there's no one perfect map, that's no excuse for creating a bad map.

Thanks for your attention in reading this. Concerned Pennsylvania citizens realize the difficulty of the redistricting task and will reward a truly nonpartisan approach.

### **3. DELTA SIGMA THETA SORORITY, INC.**

Philadelphia, PA

Pennsylvania Redistricting Cohort

State Government Committee Chair Seth Grove and Members Good Afternoon.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before this Commission. I am a proud member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., which was founded in 1913 on the campus of Howard University, an HBCU. I am a resident of Philadelphia and co-chair of Philadelphia Alumnae Chapter's Social Action Committee.

#### **ABOUT DELTA SIGMA THETA SORORITY, INC.**

Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated ("Delta" or "Sorority") is a private, nonpartisan, not-for-profit organization whose purpose is to provide assistance and support through established programs in local communities throughout the world. The sorority currently has over 350,000 college-educated members in 1,000 collegiate and alumnae chapters located in the United States, Canada, Japan (Tokyo and Okinawa), Germany, the Virgin Islands, Bermuda, the Bahamas, Jamaica, and the Republic of Korea. We have 4,000 Delta members throughout the Commonwealth who are committed to protecting the right to vote and ensuring that the Commonwealth uses maps that fairly reflect the voices of African American Pennsylvanians and other communities of color. In 1913, our 22 founders participated in the Women's Suffrage March two months after establishing the sorority, and our members have been at the forefront of social and political struggles ever since. Today, I speak on behalf of my Pennsylvania Delta sisters.

Today, we would like to share our concerns regarding the following:

1. Gerrymandering
2. Disenfranchisement

#### **OVERVIEW VOTING RIGHTS ACT**

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 addresses the history of discrimination in voting and the redistricting process. The VRA ensures that state and local governments do not pass laws or policies that deny American citizens the equal right to vote based on race. Section 2 of the VRA protects voters from discrimination based on race, color, or membership in a language minority group in all election procedures. Racial gerrymandering is a violation of the Voting Rights Act and any map that has the effect of diluting the voting rights of communities of color must be nullified.

**CENSUS RESULTS INCREASE DIVERSITY, INCREASE OPPORTUNITY** According to recent Census Data, the Commonwealth's Black and Brown population has significantly increased over the past decade. Currently, communities of color make up over 18% of Pennsylvania's total population and Census data shows that the Commonwealth has become more diverse. There was a 9.8% increase in total Black population; Hispanic or Latino population also significantly increased during the decade. This increase in diversity was distributed throughout the Commonwealth, not just in the urban centers of Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, but also in the rural areas as well. Twenty-six (26) counties saw an increase of 10-49 percent in Black population, and two counties (Lackawanna and Luzerne) each saw an increase of over 50 percent in Black population.

## GERRYMANDERING

Delta is focused on the 2020 Census results and its effects on the Commonwealth's legislative district boundaries that impact our Communities of Interest. However, our representation in the state legislature currently lacks the diversity of our state, which can be connected to how the district lines are drawn for state house and state senate. In our diverse Commonwealth, it is critical that Black and Brown communities (in accordance with the Voting Rights Act) are protected in the map-drawing process. We recognize, in the past, redistricting has been done in a manner which prevented Black and Brown voters the chance to elect their candidate(s) of choice. This is known as minority vote dilution.

We remind the Commission that it must develop a redistricting plan that complies with the standards set by the U.S Constitution, the Voting Rights Act, and state law. Those standards require that this Commission does not dilute the voices of Black and Brown voters and deny Black and Brown voters an equal opportunity to participate in the political process and to elect representatives who will support the values and interests of our communities. Maps cannot pack Black voters into too few electoral districts or crack Black communities and other communities of color across multiple districts as schemes to dilute Black and Brown voting power. The Commission also cannot proceed to pack or crack Black voters into and among districts to serve partisan interests without running afoul of the law, as well.

## PRISON GERRYMANDERING

In February 2020, the NAACP, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, and the Ballard Spahr Law Firm filed a lawsuit challenging the practice of prison-based gerrymandering in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. For redistricting purposes, prison-based gerrymandering is the practice of counting incarcerated people as residents of the prisons where they are housed, instead of the places where they lived before imprisonment. The prison population in Pennsylvania is disproportionately made up of Black and Latinx people from large cities, such as Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Allentown, and Harrisburg. Pennsylvania has constructed its prisons predominantly in rural areas where the majority of residents are white. By relying on incarcerated people's bodies to achieve near-equal populations of people among legislative districts, the Commonwealth's General Assembly artificially inflates the political power of rural, non-minority voters, and dilutes the voting strength and access to representation of communities of color in urban districts.

The practice of prison-based gerrymandering also defies logic. Most incarcerated people are not residents of the districts where they are incarcerated and have no social, economic, civic ties to the communities just beyond the prison walls. People imprisoned for felonies (the overwhelming majority of incarcerated people) cannot vote. Elected officials from districts that include prisons generally do not engage with incarcerated people or consider them to be constituents.

The Pennsylvania Constitution bars the Commonwealth from lessening the power of an individual's vote based on geographical location. In essence, the votes of community members in an incarcerated individual's home district are lessened with prison-based gerrymandering.

## DISENFRANCHISEMENT

Disenfranchisement results explicitly by law or implicitly through requirements applied in a discriminatory fashion, by placing unreasonable requirements on voters for registration or voting. As we

have seen time and time again, the burdens of these unreasonable requirements all too frequently fall disproportionately on Black and Brown communities.

In our diverse Commonwealth, it is critical that Black and Brown communities be protected in the map-drawing process. The Voting Rights Act applies to legislative apportionment and prevents district lines that would deny Black and Brown voters an equal opportunity to participate in the political process and to elect representatives of their choice. Redistricting is not just about who we are able to elect, but the opportunity to readily engage with that elected official once in office. Delta encourages each of its members and the communities that we serve to communicate with their elected officials about public policies that are of concern to them. Creating maps that are not equal in population and that are not compact, limits the active engagement our communities.

#### CLOSING REMARKS

In closing, I come before this body to ask that there be a fair, accessible, and transparent reapportionment process where the following issues are addressed: (a) elimination of gerrymandering that dilutes the voting strength of Black and Brown voters;

(b) upholding of the Voting Rights Act regarding fair representation, and (c) development of a fresh approach which recognizes and accounts for the importance of minority Communities of Interest. We appreciate the Committee looking into steps to end prison gerrymandering as that is another cause of imbalanced districts and vote dilution.

Today, we, the members of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., stand on the shoulders of our 22 Founders, thanking the State Government Committee for its robust and transparent process, thus far. We look forward to endorsing any map that safeguards the principles we have outlined in our testimony today.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before this Committee.

#### **4. Michael G., Campus Vote Project**

University Park, PA

Thank you everyone for being here today. I am a first-year student at The Pennsylvania State University, Main Campus. I am triple majoring in Criminology, Sociology and Human Development and Family Studies. I am also a Redistricting Fellow for Campus Vote Project, which is a non-partisan organization that promotes student registration and college student voter turnout. In my time as a Redistricting Fellow, I have realized that oftentimes, college students' voices are silenced. College students are at a disadvantage when students are not put into the district in which they should belong. Furthermore, most college students are also unaware that they are at this disadvantage. With the fact that college students are unaware of the districts they reside in, this can cause college students to become discouraged from voting.

Currently, some districts cut into college campuses and flush out student voices into districts that the students should not be placed in. College campuses should have distinguishable districts that adequately represent the student population. According to UnivStats, The Pennsylvania Colleges Student Population says there are 715,033 college students. Of these college students, at the University of Pennsylvania, there are 40.7% White students, 16.2% Asian students, 7.83% Hispanic or Latinx students, and 6.74% of Black or African American Students. Whereas at The Pennsylvania State University, there are 64.7% White students, 10.4% International students, 7.5% Hispanic or Latinx students, 6.7% Asian students, and 5.5% Black or African American students. These new district lines should accommodate students of

all races and ethnicities. This leads into my next topic being the demographics of the state of Pennsylvania.

Over the next ten years, the new redistricting lines will have an effect on the communities they encompass. This is where demographics come into play. Only two counties, Butler and Cumberland Counties saw an increase in their “white alone population” from 2010 to 2020, and these numbers were +0.9% and +0.5% respectively. Black Pennsylvanians accounted for 12.7 percent of the state’s total population in 2020, an increase of 9.8% from 2010. The percentage of Pennsylvanians who identified as “white alone” decreased by 6.3 percent over the decade to 75 percent, and Hispanic and Latino Pennsylvanians accounted for 8.1 percent of the state's total population in 2020, an increase of 45.8% since 2010. This influx of Black, Hispanic and Latinx Pennsylvania residents shows us that we should be redrawing these lines for the people they will be serving.

In conclusion, I ask you to take these numbers into consideration as you redraw our district lines. I urge you to be cognizant of these residents when you are redrawing the lines and consider the future college students that will be affected by these new districts. Furthermore, I ask you to keep Black and Indigenous and People of Color and their communities together. Communities of interest are an essential part of our redistricting process and need proper consideration. Thank you for your time and for your service to the Commonwealth.

**5. Harrison F., Penn Leads the Vote**  
Philadelphia, PA

Dear Members of the House State Government Committee,

Penn Leads the Vote (PLTV) is a student-run, non-partisan program at the University of Pennsylvania that increases voter engagement and voting while advancing Penn’s role of supporting the democratic and civic engagement of the university community. Penn Leads the Vote believes civic engagement is vital to fully realizing the potential of a democratic society. We also believe colleges and universities have both an opportunity and a responsibility to support students’ democratic development and civic participation, including, but not limited to, voting.

To ensure redistricting is done fairly and representatively, the committee must count college students the same as other residents when drawing new legislative districts. Students are far from a negligible group. The Philadelphia area is home to around 450,000 college students, and many of them spend a majority of their time in a region other than at their “permanent” residence. Additionally, the federal Higher Education Act and Supreme Court of the United States have affirmed the rights of students. As a result, voter turnout across the state has skyrocketed to historic levels and many students completed their census at college rather than their childhood home. The Commonwealth’s students actively complete their civic duties and have a right to equal representation and consideration in the redistricting process.

Penn Leads the Vote also wants to stress the importance of including youth voices and perspectives in the redistricting process. The lack of youth representation on the Pennsylvania Legislative Redistricting Commission and other bodies involved in reapportionment results in the construction of barriers that prevent youth from participating in the process. For example, holding this hearing at 9am on a Wednesday in an area of Philadelphia inaccessible by public transportation and bike means a vast majority of the area’s youth will be unable to attend and provide their input. The Committee and Commission should create opportunities for youth engagement in this process. Possible initiatives may

include hosting a hearing on a college campus, meeting with student leaders in a smaller setting, or conducting information sessions for students on how the redistricting process works and how to submit testimony and feedback. Not only would involving youth ensure reapportionment takes into consideration youth perspectives, but it would also expose the next generation of leaders to this critically important process. After all, youth will live with the consequences of this commission's decisions longer than any other group. Actively involving them now will ensure the long-term stability and integrity of our democratic processes. The best learning is doing.

We hope the House State Government Committee and Redistricting Commission will safeguard the inclusion of college students in population counts as well as take proactive steps to involve more youth with the redistricting process.

Sincerely,  
Directors of Penn Leads the Vote

**6. Stephanie J.**  
Philadelphia, PA

I am a life-long resident of South Philadelphia and have lived in the 26th ward my whole life. I do not believe that South Philadelphia belongs in a congressional district with Delaware county. My reasoning for this is because for one, South Philadelphia and Delaware county have different politics, this can be seen in the 2020 election, where the 26th and 39th wards that represent the largest portion of South Philadelphia and are both in the 5th congressional district, improved for Donald Trump. Donald Trump won the 26th by a bigger margin than four years ago (2016- Trump 49%- Clinton 48%; 2020- Trump 55%- Biden 44%) and Donald Trump got 1,500 more votes in the 39th ward compared to 2016 while Joe Biden only got 200 more than Clinton. while Delaware county improved 2.5 percentage points better for Joe Biden throughout the whole county. Secondly, Delaware county has different issues plaguing their county compared to South Philadelphia, these are just some of the reasons why I would like to see South Philadelphia be put into a congressional district with the rest of the city.

**7. Pamela H., President, Greater Northeast Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce**

GNPCC supports an open, transparent, and impartial redistricting process. The goal of the process is to develop Congressional Districts that reflect the communities that are contained within the district. Currently, the coverage of Northeast Philadelphia is all within one congressional district, and the current proposal has the Northeast divided into two different districts. This would divide the Northeast and alienate wide swaths of the community-business and regular neighborhoods. The general principle of "Compactness" would be violated if significant portions of Philadelphia are moved into Bucks County.

The concept of the Community of Interest and respecting existing "political boundaries" would be disregarded with this proposal. Philadelphians who have an educational system managed by the appointed School Board would now have to adapt to an elected Board. That is merely one example of the myriad different political and logistical issues that would be created with this proposal.

President  
Greater Northeast Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce