

Testimony of Mona Cohen (Philadelphia Regional Hearing)

I am a Northeast Philadelphia gal, and I always have been.

And there is a certain distinction to that. It's nebulous, it's hard to put your finger on it, but you know it when you see it or hear it. You know it when you live it. And you recognize it in others. Maybe by a certain intonation, maybe by a shared reference. There are many Facebook groups dedicated to this phenomena, with names like "Growing up Jewish in Northeast Philadelphia" or "Memories of Northeast Philadelphia."

These are groups held together through a shared experience and a recognition that Northeast Philadelphia is a special place with a strong sense of community.

It's that sense of community that brings me here today. Depending on how you define it, Northeast Philadelphia is a fabric of communities that contains almost 400,000 people. If it were its own city, it would be the second largest in Pennsylvania, ahead of Pittsburgh and behind only the rest of Philadelphia.

Yet despite this size, we maintain the feeling of a small town, with neighborhoods connected by shared history, economic concerns and a community pride that is impossible to quantify.

As our state government proceeds with the congressional redistricting process in the coming weeks and months, I'm sorry to say that we've seen maps published in the media that would break up Northeast Philadelphia, cutting our community in half, with half of us being moved into an overwhelming Bucks County based district and the rest of us being moved into a district heavily weighted toward Center City Philadelphia and areas outside the Northeast.

We do not want to see that happen.

Northeast Philadelphia has always been based in one congressional district precisely because we are one community with a shared history, economy and sense of ourselves.

Such a large group of people with common interests deserves to have one voice in the federal government. If any map breaking up Northeast Philadelphia were approved, everyone in the Northeast, from community groups to businesses to average citizens would see their representation in Washington diluted and would be worse off for it.

I've been heavily involved in community advocacy for many years, fighting against harmful construction projects and developments that would hurt Northeast Philadelphia. One of the benefits of our current maps is that we have a small list of Northeast Philadelphia based local, state and federal elected officials who we can advocate to.

If Northeast Philadelphia is broken up at the congressional level, will elected officials who live in Bucks County or Center City have the same interest in Northeast Philadelphia's challenges? I don't think so.

We are a large, cohesive community and we want one member of Congress that we can advocate to who understands our shared concerns, from Mayfair to Parkwood, Somerton to Burholme and

everywhere in between. We don't want to see our region cut up such that the Northeast becomes an afterthought in a district in Bucks County or anywhere else.

We are our own entity, with our own memories, our own flavors, our own shared experiences, and we do not want to see any redistricting plan enacted that would divide us. We deserve better than that, and we deserve fair representation in Washington. Thank you.

Mona Cohen