



# Draw the Lines

## HOW TO MEET WITH YOUR STATE LAWMAKERS

### THE WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, WHY AND HOW

The ultimate goal of Draw the Lines PA goes beyond voters and students drawing their own election maps.

It's for DTL participants to use their maps as a point of entry for a meeting with their elected representatives, to discuss how redistricting should be handled in Harrisburg in 2021.

How can you go about setting up such a meeting? Let's run through the steps using that old-fashioned tool: The Five W's i.e. Who, What, Where, When, Why (plus How).

### WHO

Your main focus should be the two people who represent you in Harrisburg in the state legislature, which in Pennsylvania is called the General Assembly.

- 1) Your state *Representative*, who is a member of the House, the larger of the two chambers of the General Assembly. There are 203 state representatives.
- 2) Your state *Senator*, who is one of 50 members of the state Senate.

These folks are your focus because, when it comes to redistricting, the General Assembly is where the action is. Both houses of the General Assembly have to approve any reform to how Pennsylvania draws its election maps.

If you don't know who your state representative or senator is, you can find their names on the [PA legislative website](#).

Just enter your home address on the first screen. You will be shown the names of your state House member and state Senator. Click on the links to see contact information for the state lawmakers, who have offices both in Harrisburg and their home district.

(BTW: On this site, you'll also be shown the name of your U.S. congressperson. There's no harm in sharing your map with your congressperson but understand that the U.S.

Congress does not set the rules for redistricting, even for the congressional map. The Pennsylvania General Assembly does.)

## WHAT

You are seeking a constituent meeting to discuss an issue that is important to you. Legislators really do care about what their constituents think – and they are most likely to approve a meeting with someone who votes in their district (or is the child of parents who vote).

## WHERE

It's often more convenient for you (and for your legislator) to visit the legislator's district office.

Legislators are usually really busy when they are in Harrisburg; district office visits tend to be easier to schedule while making more of an impact. If you've never been to Harrisburg and really want to see the Capitol, you can try for a meeting there; just understand it will be more difficult to schedule and more likely to be cut short or postponed.

If you are part of a high school or college class that took part in Draw the Lines, it's quite possible that lawmakers will agree to a class visit. Draw the Lines staff is ready to assist you or your teacher in setting that up (and seeking media coverage of the visit, which is a big inducement for lawmakers to make the effort).

Contact us at [info@drawthelinespa.org](mailto:info@drawthelinespa.org) if you want help setting up a class visit.

## WHEN

The legislative calendar varies from week to week, but lawmakers are most often in Harrisburg Monday to Wednesday, and in their home district on Thursday and Friday.

## WHY

By sharing your map with your elected representatives, you are accomplishing several things:

- 1) Demonstrating to them that their constituents really do care about the issue of redistricting.

- 2) Making vivid a key argument in favor of reform: Regular voters (as well as students not yet eligible to vote) are ready, willing and able to do this core task of democracy - drawing election districts.
- 3) Showing that, even on their first try, voters and students can draw a map that is fairer and makes more geographic sense than what Harrisburg did in 2011.
- 4) Proving that voters really can think through what it would take to create a fairer, more orderly, more transparent process for redistricting.

## HOW

Here are some pointers:

- ✓ Call or email the lawmaker's district office to set up a meeting. Identify yourself and mention you are a constituent. Let them know you have drawn a congressional map of Pennsylvania through the Draw the Lines PA program. Say you would like to share your map with your representative and to speak with him/her about redistricting.
- ✓ Sometimes, it will be hard to find a time to meet with a legislator and you'll be offered a meeting with a staff member instead. Don't reject that idea out of hand. Meeting with staff members can be a great opportunity, as these aides often play important roles in shaping their boss' priorities. You may be asked to send a written request or fill out an online form. Do so. If you don't hear back, follow up and be flexible about when, where, and with whom you'll meet.
- ✓ To prepare for the meeting, use the Pa. legislative website or Wikipedia to learn as much as you can about your legislator's background: how to pronounce his/her name; biography, party affiliations; committee memberships; past record on the redistricting issue. (For this, you can check Fair Districts PA's [Know Before You Vote](#) site.)
- ✓ Besides helping you prepare for the meeting, this research will make clear to the lawmakers or aide that you are a serious person who has done your homework.

## PREPARING YOUR MESSAGE

This is the most important part of getting ready. Remember: You're only going to have a few minutes, 15 at most, to get 3-5 key points across.

If you have a map to share, save a screen shot of it and print out several copies. Include on the sheet the URL (web address) for your map on the Draw the Lines' site. If you can, bring a laptop or tablet where you have your map set up and ready to view. (Try to avoid wasting precious time fumbling with technology.)

Your message should begin with who you are, where you live and why you care about the redistricting issue. If you can, say how you see this issue connecting to other issues you care about. Tell them what bothers you about the maps state government produced last time. (Check out our [Gerrymandering 101](#) package on the DTL website for ideas on messaging.)

Then, it's time to talk about your map and the Draw the Lines project. Tell them how learned about DTL, why you decided to do a map, what goals you chose for you map and what you learned by drawing the map. Then show your map.

Finally, tell your representative how you think election map-making should go the next time around, what role you think voters should have in the process. Generally speaking, we recommend telling the lawmaker that the process should be fairer, more orderly, more transparent and more inviting of voter input that. (For more specific ideas on what reforms you might back, you can check out the [FairDistrictsPA](#) website and the [Ballotpedia article on redistricting](#), which reviews how other states do it.)

It's a good idea to practice your presentation at least once ahead of time. Find a friend or family member who will help you do a practice run and give feedback.

#### [Are you going as part of a group?](#)

If you are, pick one or at most two people to speak for the group. The meeting will likely be too short for everyone to get a chance to talk. The speaker(s) can practice in front of the rest of the group ahead of time. If you have a group, the speakers should introduce the other group members.

#### [A few more tips](#)

1) The day before you're meeting is scheduled, be sure to confirm everything with the lawmaker's office. Double check the date, time, location. Get the names and contact information of any office staff members with whom you interact. Bring that information with you to the meeting and thank the staffers in person, if possible.

2) Dress in way that is respectful to the surroundings. You don't have to wear a fancy suit or dress, but don't wear shorts, sneakers, tank tops or T-shirts with off-color messages.

3) Arrive ahead of time for your meeting but be prepared to wait. Legislators and their staffs have busy schedules. If you get there late, you may miss out on your appointment. By contrast, it's not uncommon for a legislator to be late, or to have a meeting interrupted, due to their hectic schedule. Be understanding.

4) Address the lawmaker (depending on which office he/she holds) as Representative or Senator. Address aides as Mr. or Ms., unless they invite you to use first names.

5) When presenting your thoughts, it's fine to use note cards or an outline, but try not to just read a statement. Make eye contact and turn the session into a conversation. Leave time for the lawmaker or aide to respond or ask you questions.

6) If you've talked to other people – neighbors, work colleagues, classmates – whose views you are also representing, be sure to tell the lawmaker or aides that.

7) While it's important to be personal, to show that you care about the issue and are not just reading words others gave you, it's also important not to get emotional or aggressive. Don't yell or lecture. Offer respect to the people you're meeting.

8) Never discuss or make a campaign contribution when meeting with a legislator about a legislative issue.

9) After you present your map, you can make an "ask" of your legislator. The "ask" should be clear and specific in describing the action you would like your legislator to take about redistricting. The ask could be as simple as promoting or supporting the Draw the Lines program. Or it could be about a specific reform or bill you'd like the lawmaker to support. If you do not have a specific ask, at least tell the lawmakers that you hope the maps that will be drawn in 2021 will be fair and more similar to the map you have drawn than to the ones drawn in 2011.

10) If the opportunity presents itself, take a picture of the group with the legislator. (Please share these with DTL, too. Photos make a great addition to our newsletter, social media and website and will encourage other mappers to schedule meetings of their own. Tag us @drawthelinespa and use the hashtag #ourhouseourmouse.)

#### Remember to follow up

This is very important. Immediately after the visit, you should send a thank you letter or email and review key points you discussed during the meeting. Be sure to provide any additional information you may have promised and send a copy of any pictures taken with the legislator.