



Draw the Lines

**Testimony from David Thornburgh, chair of Draw the Lines PA
Legislative Reapportionment Commission
January 6, 2022**

Chairman Nordenberg and members of the Legislative Reapportionment Commission – Thank you for the opportunity to join you again as you collect feedback on the LRC’s preliminary legislative maps.

I serve as the Chair of Draw the Lines PA, a civic engagement project from the nonpartisan, good government nonprofit Committee of Seventy. Over the last four years, we’ve engaged thousands of Pennsylvanians in drawing congressional and legislative voting maps, aiming to build their civic muscle so they could actively participate in the mapping process.

I want to commend the way the commission’s preliminary maps were shared last month. Mr. Chairman and members of the LRC, we were greatly impressed with the detail in which you spelled out the process by which both the House and Senate maps were drawn, displayed the quantitative metrics for each map in comparison to the current maps, and invited public comment. We would hope that the members of the House and Senate State Government Committees took note and will choose to follow your lead in the limited time they have to produce a congressional map for the governor’s consideration.

As you’ve experienced over the last few months, the mapping technology and data available for redistricting is remarkably powerful. Before this cycle, this power was held by only a few: the political parties, and the operatives who worked for them. Now, thanks to free public platforms like Dave’s Redistricting and DistrictBuilder, any person with time and an internet connection can draw their own maps. Indeed, over 7,200 Pennsylvanians have taken up the challenge from Draw the Lines alone. As you are aware, the focus on this process is unprecedented.

Our analysis that I’m presenting today will be focused statewide, rather than offering feedback on individual districts. In short, we believe the preliminary maps are improvements on the current maps; I’ll leave it to residents to give their feedback on how the 253 maps could be improved..

What does the Pennsylvania Constitution say about criteria?

So much interest from the public has given the professional mappers a much greater understanding of the many different ways that maps can and should be drawn. We’re all aware of the criteria spelled out in the PA Constitution and federal law for legislative maps: Districts must be compact and contiguous, as nearly equal in population as practicable, and unless absolutely necessary, no political subdivision shall be divided. The maps must also adhere to the Voting Rights Act.



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What has been clear, from the work we've done through our mapping competitions and the testimony offered before this commission, the General Assembly, the Governor's advisory council, and even the Pennsylvania Redistricting Reform Commission that I chaired over two years ago, is that those criteria create a floor of standards for a voting map to meet, not the ceiling. There are additional criteria that are just as important to many Pennsylvania voters, and in fact the process outlined by the Constitution that you are following is intended to capture that very feedback.

What do voters want from the maps?

The 1,500 DTL mappers who completed a map had to declare what values mattered most to them. A fairly clear consensus emerged: the top-3 values our mappers prioritized were compact districts, competitive elections, and honoring communities of interest. An even more universal consensus emerged around what values should not be considered - either party gaining an unfair advantage and protecting incumbents.

When I chaired the Pennsylvania Redistricting Reform Commission in 2019, one of my fellow commissioners, Penn State Political Scientist Lee Ann Banasek, designed a survey asking a representative sample of Pennsylvania voters to rank which values mattered most to them. The results were similar: they favored compactness, minimizing county and municipal splits, and creating competitive elections. And just like DTL mappers, the public soundly rejected partisan advantage and incumbent protection in how the maps were drawn.

What is clear from this data is that voters prefer balanced maps. District lines should meet the constitutional requirements as a baseline, but they should also attempt to create as many districts as possible where both parties can win, and a map where election results mimic the overall preference of voters in the commonwealth.

Like you, our mappers have discovered that creating a balanced map requires a number of trade-offs. Your job is to negotiate those trade-offs in a way that maximizes each feature of the state map as much as possible.

Are these maps better than the ones they replace?

The State House map is a clear improvement over the map that was drawn in 2012. With the exception of somewhat fewer likely competitive districts, the preliminary House map exceeds its predecessor across the board. This includes massive improvements in partisan fairness, something highly valued by mappers and Pennsylvanians regardless of party affiliation. It also improves upon constitutional requirements like compactness and limiting splits, and provides greater representation for communities of color.

It is our hope that any adjustments made to this final map do not diminish the overall metrics achieved by the preliminary map.



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The preliminary Senate map is also an improvement over the 2012 map, particularly on the constitutional requirements.

Like the House map, the preliminary Senate map's most significant shortcoming in comparison to the current map is in the number of competitive districts it creates. Although this is important to a number of Pennsylvanians, it's noteworthy that creating either a House or Senate map with a greater number of competitive districts will also create more splits and make for less compact districts—two criteria on which the Constitution is clear.

Our citizen mappers have identified that incumbent protection appears to be one of the primary goals of the Senate map (only one pair of incumbents are bunched together, whereas there are eight pairs in the House). This value has been universally rejected by Pennsylvanians.

Draw the Lines is not endorsing any particular Senate map as an alternative. However, in our exception for the Senate map we will [link to another map](#) drawn by a member of our Citizen Map Corps from Pike County that improves upon the preliminary Senate map in every metric, at the expense of four sets of incumbents being districted together. It's a demonstration that you can do better in the final Senate map.

Lastly, we must stress that the maps this Commission is drawing belong to the people of Pennsylvania, not the elected officials who will run on them. We applaud the process conducted by this body so far that has included a degree of public participation more effective and meaningful than any redistricting process run before in the Commonwealth. And we urge you to consider carefully the redistricting values that Pennsylvanians have expressed so clearly for years and as this process enters its final stages. If we can do this, the public trust that has been so badly damaged by the egregious gerrymanders of past cycles has a chance to be repaired.