

Testimony of Khalif Ali, Executive Director of Common Cause Pennsylvania

Re: LRC Proposed Maps

Date: January 7, 2022

Good afternoon, my name is Khalif Ali, executive director of Common Cause Pennsylvania. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today on the draft House and Senate maps.

I want to start today by acknowledging the immense amount of work that you, as members of the LRC have put in over the last several months. Drawing maps that truly take into account public testimony, racial equity considerations along with the redistricting criteria mandated by the Pennsylvania Constitution is not an easy task. We have been heartened by how you, under the leadership of Chair Nordenburg have been able to produce a preliminary map that could be the basis for a truly historic moment in PA redistricting.

Based on our analysis, these maps are generally more compact and have fewer municipal splits than the 2011 maps. However, as you have heard from us before, the true measure of a map is how it serves the people of Pennsylvania. Redistricting is not simply about following a discrete set of rules toward a single, inevitable outcome. Instead, it is about drawing districts where every Pennsylvanian, regardless of race, political affiliation, or zip code has an equal opportunity to have their voice heard in the Pennsylvania legislature. Of course, this does not mean that political geography or the need to comply with constitutional redistricting criteria are unimportant. Rather, redistricting should be a transparent balancing act where the end result is representative maps that protect the voices of all Pennsylvanians, but particularly Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian/Pacific Islander and other communities of color who have historically been excluded or harmed by the redistricting process.

I'd like to move now to some specific concerns about the proposed maps. These concerns are based on our analysis as well as extensive conversations with partners and allies who represent impacted communities. Given the time constraints, I'm going to only focus on the House map and move relatively quickly through this list but will also submit written testimony that provides additional information.

Our analysis focused on six regions: Philadelphia, Reading, Lancaster, Harrisburg, Lehigh, and Pittsburgh. While there may be other areas of concern, we believe these six geographies have the greatest impact on communities of color, and as such have decided to prioritize them. As a general matter, our critiques in each of these areas boils down to one or both of two things: first, that the municipality is split more times than was necessary to achieve population equality and in doing so, the split has made it more difficult for voters in that municipality to elect someone who can address their unique concerns; and second, that there are alternative configurations that provide greater voting power to BIPOC communities who have historically been disenfranchised.

Philadelphia

House: We believe that the house districts are a good start, but encourage the LRC to adjust the lines so that there is a third majority Latinx district, rather than the current configuration which combines Latinx and Black populations into a coalition district that then becomes effective for EITHER a Black or a Latinx candidate.

Reading:

House: As you know, Reading is divided into three separate districts. However, our analysis, along with any number of publicly submitted maps, including the PA People's Map, has shown that the people of Reading are better served by dividing the municipality into only two districts. Additionally, we believe that an additional Latinx influence district could be drawn in the Reading area, and recommend that the LRC take that path.

Lancaster:

House: Our concern in Lancaster is not the number of splits, but rather where the splits are placed. We recommend, in accordance with the Unity Map submitted by Pennsylvania Voice, that Lancaster be split to put Franklin & Marshall in a separate district from the rest of the municipality. This configuration keeps the BIPOC population more whole, which in turn provides greater electoral influence for communities who have been left out of the process.

Harrisburg:

House: The draft LRC map would divide Harrisburg at a similar north-south dividing line to the map proposed by Fair Districts PA. However, the LRC Draft Map would place central and northern Harrisburg with Lemoyne, Camp Hill, and Pennsboro across the river in Cumberland rather than with adjacent municipalities in Dauphin. While this arrangement produces three safe democratic districts in and surrounding Harrisburg, it does so by potentially diluting representation of communities of color. We would encourage the LRC to revisit this configuration and consider keeping Harrisburg with surrounding parts of Dauphin County that have similar BIPOC populations.

Lehigh Valley (Allentown):

House: The draft LRC map divides Allentown into three districts. This division is not mandated either by equal population concerns or by protecting communities of interest in the municipality. In fact, in the current (2011) map, Allentown is split into two districts, both of which have a Latinx majority. However, only one of the districts has been able to elect a Latino representative to the Pennsylvania House. While we understand that determining effectiveness from a legal standpoint requires additional analysis, we are concerned that the proposed maps reduce the Latinx population in all three districts which will likely make it more difficult for those communities to elect a candidate of their choice. We would ask that the LRC share their racially polarized voting analysis, specifically as it relates to the Lehigh Valley so we can determine whether the proposed configuration of districts will likely result in an equal opportunity for Latinx voters to elect a candidate of their choice.

Pittsburgh:

House: We appreciate the approach that the LRC draft map has taken in the Allegheny County/Pittsburgh area. While we may quibble on the exact placement of some of the district lines, we commend the LRC for incorporating public comment, particularly from Pennsylvania Voice, in this region.

Thank you again for all the work you have put into creating these maps, as well as your attention to public testimony, including today.