

Representative Tim Hennessey
House District 26

Re: Legislative Reapportionment Commission, Harrisburg, PA

I join in the criticism of the proposed House District plans approved 3-2 by the Legislative Reapportionment Commission on December 16, 2021, especially with regard to House Districts 26 and 74 in Chester County.

House District 74 was formed ten years ago with the stated purpose of “creating an urban district in western Chester County.” It joined Downingtown with Coatesville, to assure an urban character amid the surrounding largely agricultural areas in western Chester County. The proposed plan totally deconstructs that urban district (and the community of interest it created) adding rural areas to Downingtown and diluting its urban character.

In a similar way, Coatesville - Chester County’s only 3rd class city - has its urban influence severely reduced because it is merged with Honey Brook, West Caln and West Sadsbury Townships, all primarily agricultural. The urban character of House District 74 is substantially diminished when almost half (47%) of the district is now agricultural.

There is no protection of the constitutionally required community of “urban” interests, which was the reason House District 74 was created just ten years ago.

In a similar way, House District 26 is currently a largely agricultural district, giving a unified voice to the agricultural areas it contains. But the same action which placed those agricultural areas into HD 74 took them away from HD 26, severing the community of “agricultural” interests, which have existed there for almost 30 years.

The agricultural areas transferred to HD 74 were not replaced in HD 26 with other agricultural areas. Instead, the areas added to House District 26 are recovering steel towns. District 26 no longer has an agricultural focus (a Constitutional united commonality), but rather has a bifurcated agricultural / industrial character that reduces its agricultural identity.

In addition to just these two districts, a higher-level view of Chester County indicates that even though Chester County's registered Democrats outnumber registered Republicans by a slim 51%-49% margin, the County's nine legislative districts are drawn to favor the Democrat candidate in eight of them - an 89% victory rate (see Philadelphia Inquirer, December 16, 2021).

Similarly in Bucks County, with an almost identical 51%-49% split, the Inquirer article found that 7 out of 10 districts (70%) lean Democrat or are rated as "safely Democrat." In Montgomery County, where Democrats hold a 59%-41% registration edge, 12 of 13 House Districts would expect to go to a Democrat candidate (an 92% victory rate) and in Delaware County, where Democrats hold a 57%-43% edge, the maps have been drawn to favor the Democrat in 10 out of 10 districts (100%).

Overall, the four ring counties surrounding Philadelphia have a 55% Democrat registration edge, but the proposed maps favor the Democrat in 34 out of 39 districts (87%).

It's clear that the preliminary maps approved on December 16th are drawn to treat Southeastern Pennsylvania in a disproportionate (and unconstitutional) manner and should be seen to not meet the required level of Constitutional fairness.

Respectfully,

State Rep. Tim Hennessey
House District 26