

Written Testimony

Summary of Adjustments to the 2020 Census Data

Pennsylvania Legislative Reapportionment Commission

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October 22, 2021

Dear Chairman and Members of the Legislative Reapportionment Commission:

As background for the public meeting scheduled for Monday, October 25, 2021, this letter summarizes the tasks completed by the Legislative Data Processing Center and the Penn State Data Center in preparation for legislative redistricting. Specifically, it describes the corrections and adjustments made to the geographic and population data distributed by the United States Census Bureau.

The Census Bureau's Census 2020 Redistricting Data Program¹ began in 2015 and allowed states to receive population totals for election precincts and similar areas. There were three phases to the Census Bureau's program.

The "Block Boundary Suggestion Project (BBSP)" was the first phase. It was completed in 2017. It offered states the opportunity to understand the algorithm planned for defining 2020 Census tabulation blocks. States also had the chance to identify the blocks they would like retained for the 2020 Census, and the blocks they would like removed from the inventory prior to the 2020 Census Redistricting Summary file release in 2021. The files were reviewed and returned to Census without change.

The "Voting District Project (VTDP)" was the second phase. It began in late 2017 and offered states the opportunity to submit their voting districts, codes, and names to the Census Bureau for the development of data products in the Phase 3 release of the 2020 Census Redistricting Data Program. In July 2017, the Penn State Data Center (PaSDC) was selected to serve as the GIS specialist for the General Assembly. At the start of the Phase 2 project, county election and voter registration officials were contacted for assistance and to submit updated voting precincts directly to the Penn State Data Center. PaSDC compiled the responses and reviewed for accuracy, then submitted them to the Census Bureau in May 2018. Two subsequent "Verification" phases were completed in May 2019 and March 2020.

¹ Redistricting Data Program

<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/about/rdo/program-management.html>

The "Data Delivery Project" was the third phase. Public Law (P.L.) 94-171², enacted by Congress in December 1975, requires the Census Bureau to deliver redistricting data to state officials responsible for legislative redistricting within one year after the census (April 1, 2021). In April 2020, the Census Bureau announced³ that due to delays caused by COVID-19, the 2020 Census data collection program would be delayed by 120 calendar days, and the P.L. 94-171 data set would be delivered no later than July 31, 2021. This timeline was delayed further⁴ in February 2021 to indicate that the P.L. 94-171 data set would be delivered by September 30, 2021.

On February 12, 2021, the Census Bureau released the TIGER/line shapefiles⁵, including the geography at the block, tract, municipality, and county levels.

On August 12, 2021, the Census Bureau distributed⁶ 2020 Census population totals for counties, municipalities, state legislative districts, election districts, census tracts, block groups, and blocks. The totals included a count of all people by race, Hispanic or Latino, and not Hispanic or Latino by race. It also included a count of the population 18 years and older by race, Hispanic or Latino, and not Hispanic or Latino by race. When LDPC received the population data, we began a review and determined that adjustments were necessary in four areas.

The first area dealt with alterations to election precincts that occurred after Phase 2 and continued through December 31, 2020. Pennsylvania's election precincts could be combined or divided during this time. As a result, census population data were assigned to precincts that no longer existed or had substantially changed. All precinct changes were identified. The boundaries of 66 voting precincts were altered and the necessary adjustments were made to the population data.

The second area dealt with split block situations. This occurs when a voting district boundary does not follow a census block boundary. During the review process, if it was determined that there was a discrepancy between the Census Bureau's voting district boundary and the Commonwealth's voting district boundary, it was corrected. In some cases, this adjustment of the boundary created what is known as a split block. A split block is a census block that is partially contained in two or more election precincts. In a split block situation, the precinct boundary will cross through or straddle a census block. This requires adjustment of the population. For example, census block 1001 may contain 250 people. The line between precinct A and B cuts through census block 1001 creating a

² Public Law 94-171, Congress.gov

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/94th-congress/house-bill/1753/text/pl>

³ Statement on 2020 Census Operational Adjustments Due to COVID-19

<https://2020census.gov/en/news-events/press-releases/statement-covid-19-2020.html>

⁴ Census Bureau Statement on Redistricting Data Timeline

<https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2021/statement-redistricting-data-timeline.html>

⁵ 2020 Census Geographic Products Available

<https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2021/2020-census-geographic-products-feb12.html>

⁶ Census Bureau releases P.L. 94-171 Summary files

<https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-kits/2021/2020-census-redistricting.html>

split block situation. It is inaccurate to assign the 250 people in that census block to either precinct A or precinct B. The 250 people should be divided between precinct A and B.

With the agreement of the redistricting staff for the legislative caucuses, an allocation formula based on voter registration data was applied to distribute the precinct population. The purpose of the formula was to allocate individuals residing in a split block to their respective precincts. The split block situations involved 5,056 people in 53 blocks.

The third area involved situations where voting district codes and names, and municipality names were incorrect in the Census PL94- 171 files. These were corrected in 11 voting precincts but did not affect the 2020 Census population numbers.

At the direction of the offices of the House and Senate Majority and Minority Leaders, LDPC and PaSDC adjusted the 2020 Census population data as outlined above. After these corrections, the total number of active precincts in the Commonwealth is currently 9,178.

On August 24, 2021, the Legislative Reapportionment Commission approved Resolution 4A⁷, which would reallocate the census data for most prisoners held in state correctional institutions from the district in which the institution is located to the district that was their last known home address prior to incarceration. These adjustments were completed, moving 26,821 individuals from their correctional facility to their last known address.

All adjustments and corrections were completed on October 14, 2021, and the revised data sets were delivered to staff for the Legislative Reapportionment Commission.

⁷ Legislative Reapportionment Commission Approves Resolution Regarding Prisoner Data Reallocation
<https://www.redistricting.state.pa.us/commission/article/1070>