

Chairman: Thank you for your service. You are the voice for the ordinary Pennsylvanian on the commission. Pennsylvanians are counting on you to hold the elected leaders on the Commission accountable for what is really at stake in this process. These leaders are going to do what they always do: manipulate maps to benefit their caucus.

I don't know you Mr. Chairman, but I have faith that you want maps that fairly represent our communities.

The proposed senate maps in the Lehigh Valley are not reflective of what is in the Valley's best interest. The new 14th is plopped in the

heart of the Lehigh Valley carving up our largest cities and school districts to suit Harrisburg's needs, not the needs of these communities.

Today, the Lehigh Valley enjoys representation of three senators (16th, 18th and 40th), these seats are competitive/swing and far more reflective of communities of interests that make up the Lehigh Valley.

Politically speaking, the end result of the preliminary plan super packs Democrats into one seat and super packs Republicans in two other seats. This doesn't reflect the reality of the Lehigh Valley.

When it comes to redistricting, history shows that Northampton County is butchered, carved up and patched together every cycle for

decades and this one is proving to be no different. This is second time I have appeared at these hearings to express frustration and to fight for better maps. – I'm the only Senator that has had to do so.

This is why I have worked at the forefront of real re-districting reform with Fair Districts, the Committee of Seventy and League of Women Voters to create an Independent Commission to do this – to take the politics out of it. For the record in 2018, the Senate did pass Senate Bill 22 which I was the prime sponsor of that would have created an Independent Commission – but failed to go anywhere in the house

Northampton County has population of 305,000 and by its own right should have its own senatorial district.

Even with a steady growth in population, which should result in a more compact district, the 18th district changes once again by 40%. In over 20 years as a Senator, I have represented 44 different municipalities, only 5 have remained constant.

I submit these maps as evidence of the 18th district being routinely gerrymandered (**slide 1**)... Parts of Monroe County in, Parts of Monroe County out, Northern Northampton County (locally known as the Slate belt), in Slate belt, out, slate belt back in, Nazareth in, Nazareth out, Easton (the County seat) in, Easton out, Easton back in,

portion of Bethlehem out, all of Bethlehem in, portion of Bethlehem out; Whitehall out, Whitehall in – Whitehall out – you get my drift. I just named the larger areas, but this scenario plays out in all 44 municipalities. I could name all of them but that would take up too much of your time.

Why is the 18th district significantly altered every single redistricting cycle?

Perhaps it is because Northampton is a bell weather county when it comes to national and statewide elections that makes it ripe for gerrymandering.

Maybe it is because both counties have a higher percentage of Independents and Non-affiliated voters than other areas of the state.

Whatever the political reason, it needs to stop.

In 2000 – I actually sued because the final plan removed Northampton's **COUNTY SEAT**, the City of Easton, from the 18th Senate district, and dropped it in the 24th Senatorial district with towns in Bucks county, for purely political purposes (solely to remove a certain senator. Some on the Commission know that story).

Here I am again – fighting against another politically motivated shredding of the 18th Senatorial district. The reason I fight hard is I have seen firsthand what happens to the communities left behind

when this process unnecessarily separates them from where they belong.

Easton suffered for a decade and I don't want the same fate for Bethlehem or any of the communities I represent.

Mr. Chairman, one of my biggest objections to the preliminary plan is how it treats the City of Bethlehem where I was born and raised. The separation of the neighborhood of West Bethlehem and merging it with a large portion of Allentown in the newly created 14th seat needs to change. **It is UNNECESSARY and UNCONSTITUTIONAL.**

West Bethlehem is a neighborhood in the City of Bethlehem, a City with just under 80,000 residents.

West Bethlehem, like other neighborhoods in Bethlehem: downtown, northeast and southside all vote for Bethlehem's Mayor, City Council and school board.

That's why my office sits in the heart of the City, two blocks from "West Bethlehem" and six blocks from South Bethlehem.

100 plus years ago West Bethlehem merged with the City of Bethlehem because the residents wanted to be united and saw the benefit of being one City.

Not unlike when Allegheny City (now the Northside of Pittsburgh) merged with the City of Pittsburgh. Coincidentally, it happened around the same time.

Bethlehem is the seventh largest city in the Commonwealth. All comparable sized cities in Pennsylvania sit in their own senatorial district.

So why break up this City? It must be politically motivated because there is no other reason to splinter Bethlehem into 2 senate districts. Bethlehem is the largest municipality in Northampton County. It is the anchor of the urban core of the County.

The City owns and operates a regional water and sewer system serving municipalities in Northampton county. 911 services are provided by Northampton County to the City of Bethlehem, that includes West Bethlehem.

Moreover, Bethlehem is the largest municipality that makes up the Bethlehem area school district, the 6th largest in the state located in Northampton County. Its intermediate unit is in Northampton County.

The cities of Allentown and Bethlehem have no overlapping municipal services. Allentown has its own school district which is part of a separate Intermediate Unit in Lehigh County. Merging these cities doesn't serve either community.

The school districts and cities are vastly different. They have unique needs that demand separate representation in the Senate like the enjoy today.

They are too large to be competing for the attention of one Senator for limited resources. One of these cities and school districts will lose out under this plan--- and that is just wrong.

Mr. Chairman, the plan for the 18th Northampton based district needs to mirror its growth. A more compact district taking the opportunity to better unify school districts and shedding communities that have more in common with Lehigh County. I am all for creating new opportunities for people whether it is minorities, people of color, women, lgbtq.

When I first ran for Senate I was one of only 7 women in the chamber, so I understand the need for opportunity.

That said, packing democrats or cracking republicans to artificially create a “minority” influenced seat at the expense of true communities of interest here in the Lehigh Valley is **not the answer**.

News articles report that there are far better areas in the state where a minority influenced seat can actually have the desired result you are looking for. What is proposed in the Lehigh Valley doesn't accomplish that goal.

One last point, Mr. Chairman. The Supreme Court frowns upon localized challenges to state maps, regardless of how egregious, as a reason to throw out any final map. I know this firsthand because some members of the Pa Supreme Court in the Easton suit I filed 20 years ago

clearly thought that what happened to Easton and the 18th district was wrong, but alone was not enough to require a complete re-draw of the state map. And that is what some of these Commissioners are counting on.

That is why what happens **now**, before the final maps are voted on, is so critical for areas like the Lehigh Valley. You, Mr. Chairman need to ensure that municipalities like Bethlehem are not split up “unless absolutely necessary”. Those words were written into our State Constitution for a reason, **they should mean something**, and you have a profound influence on their application.

Make no mistake, the decisions you make today will set precedent for the next maps and have real impacts on communities for a decade and beyond. Better maps in the Lehigh Valley start with a unified City of Bethlehem in a district with the communities with which it shares municipal services and a school district. One that reflects real communities of interests, not ones artificially created to support a Harrisburg political narrative.

Mr. Chairman you can stop these unnecessary municipal splits.

You can stop one more butchering of the 18th Senatorial district. As you see through public comment, our community is standing up and saying enough is enough.

Mr. Chairman, I am putting my faith in you to create a map that keeps the City of Bethlehem whole in a more compact 18th Senatorial district.

You are the people's voice and we are counting on you.

Thank you for allowing me to speak my mind.

EIGHTEENTH SENATORIAL DISTRICT



