

Written Testimony

Hearing regarding Receipt and Adjustment of the 2020 Census Data

Pennsylvania Legislative Reapportionment Commission

July 13, 2021

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July 13, 2021

Dear Chairman and Members of the Legislative Reapportionment Commission:

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this hearing. My name is Brent McClintock, and I am the Executive Director of the Legislative Data Processing Center (LDPC). We are a bipartisan service agency, providing technical and operational support to the General Assembly since 1968.

The Role of LDPC in Redistricting

One of my office's responsibilities is to provide support to the General Assembly through the Congressional reapportionment process, and to the Legislative Reapportionment Commission through the Legislative redistricting process.

In 2014, I was appointed as Pennsylvania's legislative liaison to the U.S. Census department for the 2020 Redistricting Data Program¹, a role that LDPC has served in since 1980. This is a multi-phase project that allows each state to provide accurate and updated information to the Census department in preparation for the decennial Census counts. In 2017, the Penn State Data Center (PaSDC) was selected as our partner to provide GIS expertise.

Preparation in advance of the 2020 Census

The work of preparing for the 2020 Census began in 2017, with the "Phase 2 Voting District Project" (VDP). This program provides states the opportunity to delineate voting districts and to suggest census block boundaries for use in the 2020 Census redistricting data tabulations. After the Census Bureau completes the decennial Census, this geography is paired with the population counts. This

¹ Redistricting Data Program Management

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

data set, mandated by Public Law (P.L.) 94-171², is provided to each state as the basis for the redistricting process. Our last submission to the Census department was on March 31, 2020.

Receipt and Adjustment of the 2020 Census data

Once the U.S. Census department delivers the official P.L. 94-171 data, LDPC and PaSDC will review this dataset and apply adjustments if necessary. This adjusted data is then certified by the Legislative Reapportionment Commission in “usable” form.

In 2019, HB1588 instructed counties to avoid any election district changes between December 31, 2019 through November 30, 2022. However, previous decades have shown that changes to precincts have still occurred during this timeframe. To provide the most accurate representation for reapportionment, LDPC and PaSDC will work together to update the maps provided by Census and adjust the population accordingly.

During the last redistricting program in 2011, LDPC reviewed the Census P.L. 94-171 data and determined that adjustments were necessary in four areas. These same adjustments may be necessary again in 2021.

The first area dealt with alterations to election precincts that occurred after the completion of Phase 2 VDP. Pennsylvania's election precincts were 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. Precinct boundaries 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.

The third area dealt with census block coding errors. There were several cases where census blocks were assigned to incorrect election precincts. These were identified and corrected.

The fourth area involved situations where voting district codes and names, and municipality names were incorrect in the Census P.L. 94-171 files.

² Public Law 94-171, Congress.gov
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/94th-congress/house-bill/1753/text/pl>

Delays in the Delivery of Census Data

The Census data was expected to be delivered by April 1, 2021. However, on April 13, 2020, the Census department announced³ that due to delays caused by COVID-19, the 2020 Census data would be delayed until July 31, 2021. This delivery was pushed back further to September 30, 2021⁴.

We understand that this poses a significant hardship to the Commission relating to the work of Reapportionment in regard to the 2022 Election deadlines, so LDPC and PaSDC have identified areas of work that can be completed in advance to expedite the process. One avenue may be to use the "legacy" format of the Census data⁵ that will be made available in mid-August 2021. We will evaluate this release to see if it can be used, assuming that the August and September releases from Census will be identical.

Still, the process of adjusting and validating the data requires time. In 1990, 2000, and 2010, there were at least four months between the release of the P.L. data and the certification of the data by the Commission. By identifying work that can be completed prior to the official P.L. data release, we hope to shorten this timeframe from four months to two months, and to present the Commission with adjusted data by mid-October 2021.

	1990	2000	2010
Census release of the official P.L. 94-171 data	Feb. 22, 1991	Mar. 9, 2001	Mar. 9, 2011
Work required to adjust data	4 months, 5 days	4 months, 1 day	5 months, 9 days
Commission certifies the data in "usable" form	June 27, 1991	July 10, 2001	Aug. 17, 2011
Commission adopts the Final State Legislative Redistricting Plan	Nov. 15, 1991	Nov. 19, 2001	Dec. 12, 2011

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 U.S. Census Bureau Statement on Release of Legacy Format Summary Redistricting Data File
<https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2021/statement-legacy-format-redistricting.html>