

Written Testimony

Website Updates Providing for Public Participation

Pennsylvania Legislative Reapportionment Commission

July 29, 2021

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July 29, 2021

Good afternoon, Chairman, and Commissioners,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. As you well know, your obligation to redistrict the state legislative boundaries is a complex and difficult task. As you have approached this responsibility in 2021, each of the members of the Legislative Reapportionment Commission has expressed a strong commitment to an open and transparent process. From the Commission's inception in March, legislative leaders have made it clear that collecting public input would be a high priority for this Commission. When the announcement¹ was made to certify the legislative leaders for the Commission, Speaker of the House, Bryan Culter said:

"For Pennsylvanians to trust in the results of the redistricting process, we must ensure every step is as transparent as possible. Today's announcement marks the starting point and allows for maximum time to collect public input on district lines for the next ten years."

The Commission has continued to advance this priority since the Chairman assumed his role. One tool that is enabling this open and transparent process is the Commission's updated website. A number of features were recently added that provide the citizens of Pennsylvania with new ways to participate.

I'd like to spend a few minutes today highlighting these new features. A link to the website, <https://www.redistricting.state.pa.us>, is also included in today's meeting agenda.

¹ Legislative Leaders Name Reapportionment Commission Members
<https://www.redistricting.state.pa.us/commission/article/1060>

Public Comment

New features were added today, inviting the public to provide their feedback in three different ways.

The screenshot shows the 'COMMENT' page on the Pennsylvania Redistricting website. The page features a navigation bar with links for Home, Commission, Legislative, Congressional, Maps, and Comment. The main heading is 'COMMENT' in large blue letters. Below this, the section is titled 'Participate in the Redistricting Process'. The text explains that each decade, Pennsylvania uses census data to complete the process of setting Congressional and Legislative district boundaries. The Legislative Reapportionment Commission invites all citizens to provide input and feedback. Three ways to participate are listed: Submit Written Testimony, Upload a File (SHAPE or Block-equivalency file), and Draw a Statewide Map. A note states that the Commission is using this tool to secure comments but cannot answer submitted questions. A photo of people working at laptops is included, with a credit to Scott Graham on Unsplash. At the bottom, three interactive cards are shown: 'Written Testimony' with a 'Submit Testimony' button, 'File Upload' with an 'Upload a File' button, and 'Draw a Statewide Map' which is currently disabled and says '*** COMING SOON ***'.

First, citizens can submit “Written Testimony” to the Commission. This can be used to formally submit written remarks that will be presented at a public hearing. These submissions can also be used as a tool to provide feedback to the Commission independent of any formal hearing, detailing criteria that any citizen believes are important for the Commission to consider.

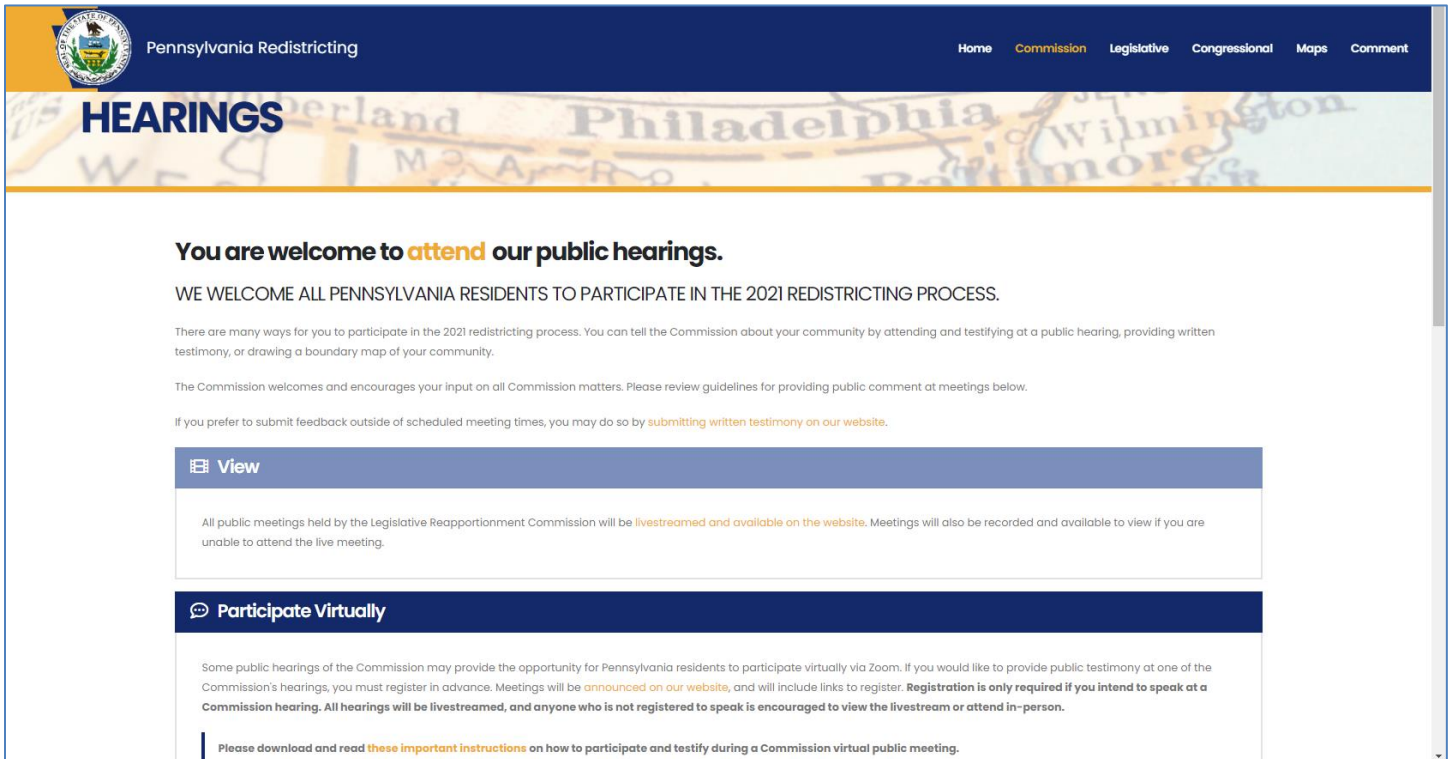
Second, citizens can upload GIS files that inform the Commission’s process of redrawing the statewide maps in 2021. They can submit a statewide map for Pennsylvania’s state House and Senate districts, or they can depict a specific community of interest. Along with these uploaded files, citizens can provide comments that describe any important distinguishing characteristics.

Lastly, online mapping tools will be available later this year. This will provide everyone with the data and tools necessary to draw their own statewide legislative maps, and to easily submit those maps to the Commission. As you know, the U.S. Census data that was expected in April is now delayed until a release later this fall. These online mapping tools will be added to the website after Census data is received.

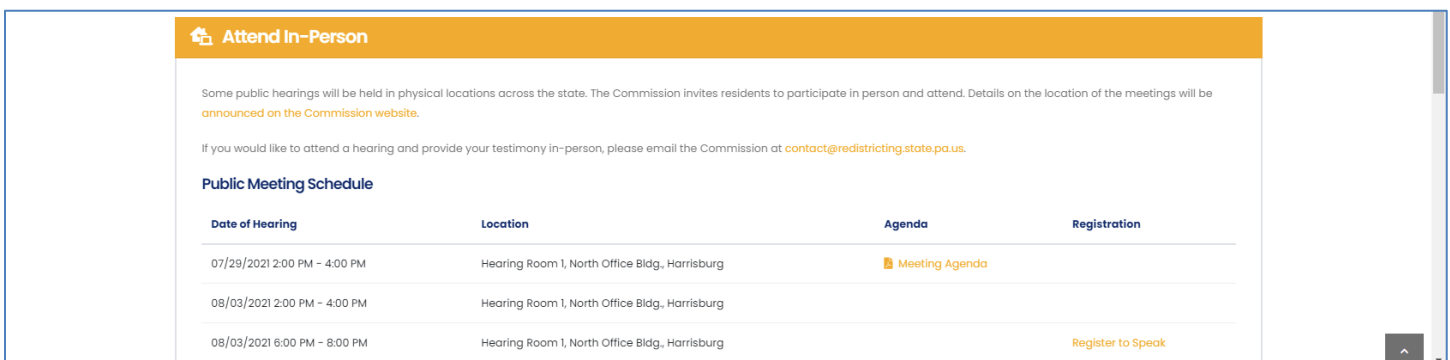
To provide the most transparent process possible, submissions to the Commission will be publicly available on the website. Citizens have the option to “tag” their submissions to provide categories that can quickly and easily be searched.

Public Hearings

In addition to the features inviting Public Comment, the website also added a new page today that details how citizens can participate in Public Hearings.



Each new hearing will be listed, along with its agenda and location, on this new page. The Commission is also scheduling hearings that invite constituents to participate virtually via Zoom. This removes any barriers that may have precluded citizens from testifying in-person due to travel or health-related concerns.



Date of Hearing	Location	Agenda	Registration
07/29/2021 2:00 PM - 4:00 PM	Hearing Room 1, North Office Bldg., Harrisburg	Meeting Agenda	
08/03/2021 2:00 PM - 4:00 PM	Hearing Room 1, North Office Bldg., Harrisburg		
08/03/2021 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM	Hearing Room 1, North Office Bldg., Harrisburg		Register to Speak

All hearings will continue to be livestreamed on the website, with recorded video posted to the website after each meeting.

Conclusion

I believe these new features provide the framework for robust public participation. This direct line of communication between the citizens of Pennsylvania and the Commission should be an important part of a process that both supports citizen participation and assists the Commission in its important work of Redistricting.