

Chair Nordenberg, Leaders Ward, McClinton, Benninghoff, and Costa:

Thank you for heeding the call for transparency in the Commission's work.

My name is Michael Waxenberg. I'm speaking to you from Pike County, where my wife and I have been homeowners since 1989. Three months ago, I appeared before this commission, seeking the seat now occupied by Chancellor Nordenberg. Congratulations, Sir. The Court could not have chosen more wisely.

By profession, I manage technology risk. My first experience drawing maps came in 2018, when I used DRA to support litigants before the Pennsylvania Supreme Court. I subsequently collaborated with my daughters on prize-winning maps in the Draw the Lines Competition. The Princeton Gerrymandering Project recently invited me to join their National Mapping Corps.

Tonight though, I wish to address an issue in our region that I believe will resonate throughout the Commonwealth. I'll begin with a brief description of our community and those around it. Then I'll share the recent history of our representation in the State Senate, to demonstrate how the Senate map has diverged from our real communities of interest. I have separately shared some images that illustrate our problem. I will conclude with recommendations for the Commission.

Pike County lies in the Northeast corner of the Commonwealth, bounded by Monroe to the south, Wayne to the northwest, and the Delaware River to the east. Since at least the 1960s, our economy has been largely defined by recreation, tourism, and services for owners of second homes. Pike has carved out a niche as the quieter alternative to Monroe, the more developed Pocono county.

Like Monroe, Pike also appeals to commuters with jobs in New York City and Northern New Jersey, reflecting the rapid rise of housing costs in the New York City metro area. This migration may accelerate as the pandemic has steered more employers toward flexible work arrangements.

The bus routes that serve the Pocono region reflect this condition. (Fig.1) These routes operate primarily during the morning and evening commutes. As a frequent passenger on the 4:47am bus from Lords Valley, I can attest that few passengers ride these buses for leisure or comfort.

Thus, geography and economics have defined a Pocono commuter and recreation rim, comprising Pike and Monroe counties, with its northern end roughly at the town of Hawley on the Pike-Wayne border. Beyond Hawley lies the heartland of northern Pennsylvania, the right arm of the famous rural "T".

Meanwhile, since 1966, our representation in the Senate has evolved in the opposite direction from that of our communities.

Until 1966, Pike and Monroe were united in the 14th Senate District. (Fig.2a) Then, for the purposes of population equivalence, the 14th moved to the southern half of Luzerne County. The 20th District, which had simply been Luzerne, kept the northern part of that county and added Pike, most of Monroe, and rural Wayne, Susquehanna, and Wyoming. (Fig.2b) In subsequent cycles, SD20 has retained this basic collar shape, encircling much of Lackawanna County. (Figs.2c-2g)

While Pike has been a constant presence in the 20th since 1966, the treatment of Monroe has varied widely. By 2001, Monroe was divided among six Senate districts, although its population would fit easily in one. (Fig.2f) The 2012 map reduced these splits; but for the first time, Monroe and Pike were separated completely. (Fig.2g) As we became more similar, the Commission has pushed us apart.

What are the consequences? First, note that when the boundaries of SD20 changed drastically in 1966, its representation did not change at all. T. Newell Wood held the seat without interruption from 1947 to 1978. He lived in Harvey's Lake, northwest of Wilkes-Barre. His successors have all lived within a few miles of Wilkes-Barre.

Through 14 terms, SD20 has been the province of one Luzerne County party organization, with lines carefully etched to protect incumbents who live at the western end of the district. The current, jagged lines reflect an arrangement that ensured tenure not only for our own Senator Baker, but also Senator Yudichak, who lives eight miles from Senator Baker and who ironically left the Democratic Party in 2019.

Where does that leave Pike? For 54 years, our Senators have owed first allegiance to Wilkes-Barre, and then to the rural counties to the north. That allegiance is evident in the legislation they sponsor, the committees on which they sit, and the way they divide their time in the district. And as Monroe County has left SD20, our senators have even less reason to prioritize our community's interests.

The solution, I believe, is simple. Together, Pike and Monroe Counties have nearly enough residents to comprise a Senate district. While it is difficult to propose exact boundaries without final data, I will say this: Pike and Monroe can be united in a single district, without requiring new divisions elsewhere. I have provided two examples in my supporting exhibits (Figs 3a-3b). I can provide updates upon receipt of final Census data.

Thank you for your attention.



Fig. 1: Pocono Commuter Bus Services as of August 2021

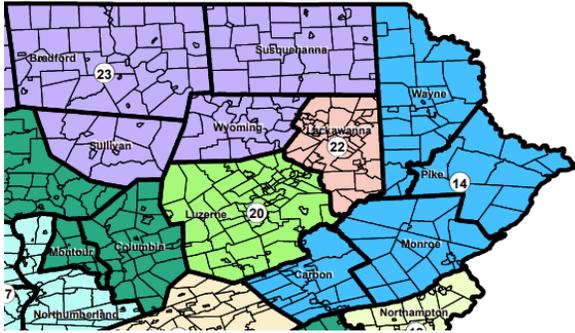


Figure 2a: State Senate (NE PA) - 1964

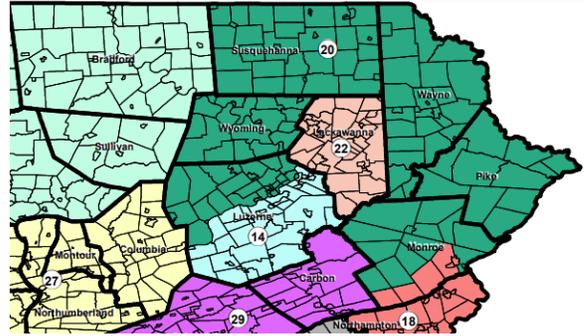


Figure 2b: State Senate (NE PA) - 1966

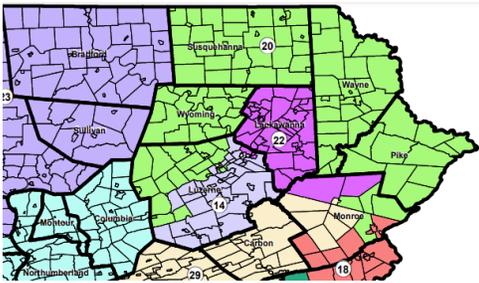


Figure 2c: State Senate (NE PA) - 1971

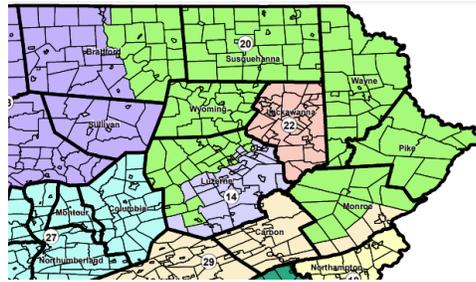


Figure 2d: State Senate (NE PA) - 1981

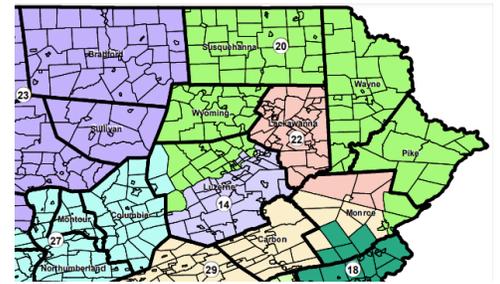


Figure 2e: State Senate (NE PA) - 1991

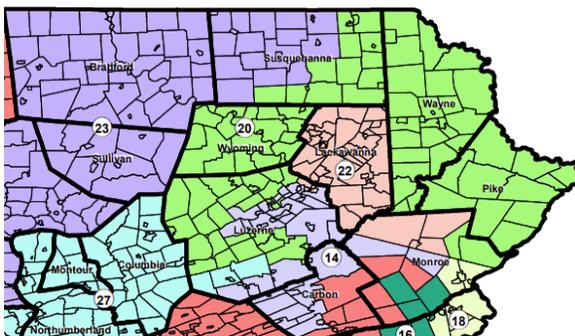


Figure 2f: State Senate (NE PA) - 2001

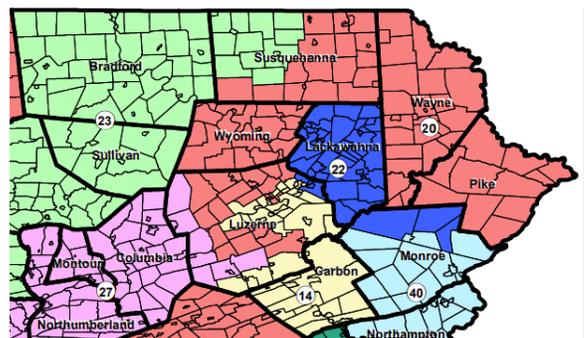


Figure 2g: State Senate (NE PA) - Current

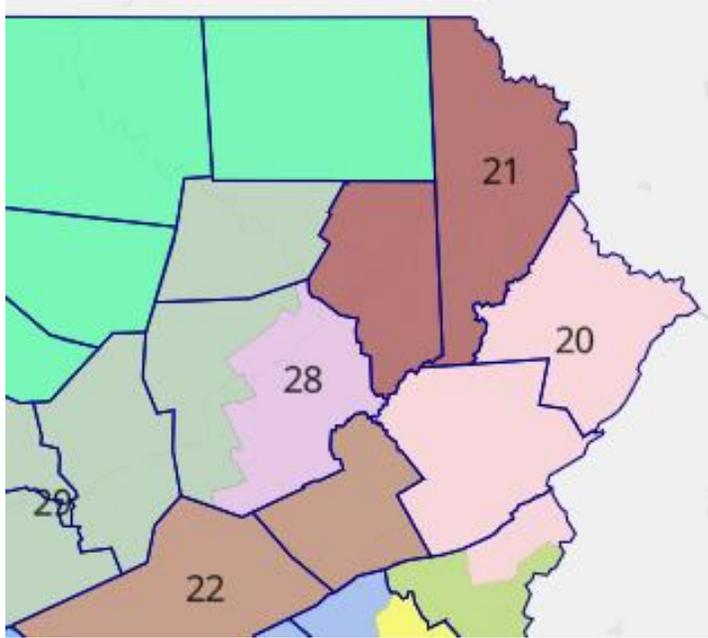


Figure 3a: State Senate (NE PA) – Sample A

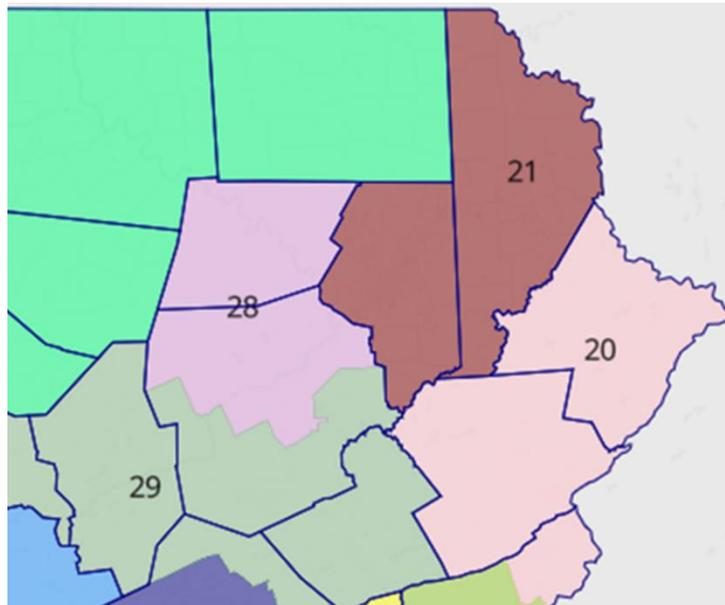


Figure 3b: State Senate (NE PA) – Sample B