

Redistricting Testimony
NJ Redistricting Commission
11/15/21

Good evening. My name is Walter I. Levy and I've been a resident of Bridgewater in Somerset County since 1992. I am not an elected official nor am I a subject matter expert in redistricting but I do care about election fairness. I was first a chemistry teacher, was a scientific programmer, and now that I'm retired I sub for the fun of it. I was a certified white water canoeing instructor, got of have a hobby.

I live in NJ's 7th congressional district; it was drawn to be a safe Republican seat. CD-7 became competitive, that is a good thing so let the best person represent us. Changing demographics, a proactive candidate, and an engaged grassroots movement did what nobody thought possible. We flipped a 40 year safe Republican seat and elected a Democrat. Competition should be healthy.

We got together and learned about how government works. We marched. We attended town halls. We held rallies and peaceful protests. We educated ourselves on the issues, our candidate's background, and where he stood on the issues. We canvassed. We phone banked. We wrote Letters to the Editor. And to our great surprise, we won.

We won and we did it legally, fairly, peacefully and democratically. We followed all the rules. We worked within the system. We did this all with a map that was drawn to favor the Republican incumbent. We won because we had the better candidate and the better campaign.

As a young-in I was never interested in politics despite some family influence, in BOTH directions. The "STAY OUT" was more from my mother.

When I saw the cost of my Rx (Gleevec) I became involved.

Until I was diagnosed with CML chronic myeloid leukemia. CML has the unique status as being the first "biological Rx", life expectancy went from 3 years to 30 years. All the primary research \$\$ NIH and other grants so why was Gleevec so expensive. The price jumped from \$15,000/year to \$30,000/year to \$50,000/year when I was first diagnosed, it climbed to \$150,000/year then dropped to \$125,000/year when it became generic. OK Medicare "D" paid for most of the cost the annual co-pay is about \$8,000/year. Medicare "D" pays the rest at \$130,000 that is MY tax dollar, that is why I got interested in politics.

The other reason why I'm here today is this: Back in the day or rotary dial phones when I was in HS I learned the term "Gerrymandering", OK whatever. TICK TOCK. In college I learned in geology what a "meander" was, I assumed it was the same grammatical root.

CD7 is already a competitive district. Congressman Malinowski won by the narrowest margin of any Democrat in the House of Representatives. I'd say that's a competitive district. This Commission should not make any radical changes to the map. Voters in the 7th should not be punished because they voted for a Democrat despite a map drawn to favor Republicans.

I understand that the 7th District is underpopulated and we need to add towns. I would suggest that it is time to unify Somerset County. And I'd like to share a story of why this makes sense.

Second reason:

When subbing I learned of some web sites that demonstrated GERRMANDERING.

I mentioned canoeing because when I look at topological maps, and when I taught earth science, maps are important. I look for water sheds, high flat area's hills and low flat flood plains and other natural boundary's.

But voting maps should not look like a dendrite (nerve cell), a coastline, the dendritic pattern of a water shed, or a squashed centipede.

A quick search of the web yields hundreds of web sites under "most/worst Gerrymandered states".

A few websites include:

Thefulcrum.us/worst-gerrymandering-districts

Rantt.com

Worldpopulation.review.com

Azavea.com

Act.represents.us

If I subtracted one map from another it should look more like measles (minor changes) not like a Rorschach test.

Thank you for listening.

Walter I. Levy

Testimony of Brigid Callahan Harrison

Mr. Chairman and members of the Commission,

I am testifying as a resident of the Borough of Longport in Atlantic County, New Jersey in the second congressional district, where in 2020, I was an unsuccessful primary candidate for that congressional seat. I am also a professor of Political Science and Law at Montclair State University, where I serve as department chair. My research interests over the past 25 years have centered on congressional elections and the reapportionment and redistricting process, and I am grateful to have the opportunity to speak before you this evening.

Throughout these hearings, you have heard testimony – both organic and arranged – from constituents urging you to protect their member of the House. Rest assured that that will not be the theme of my remarks this evening.

Rather, I wanted to call your attention to the importance of the role that redistricting plays in fomenting the partisan tensions and vitriol that are threatening our democracy, and urge you to act in a manner that serves to protect democracy rather than specific incumbents. While considerations of equal population consistent with interpretation of the Voting Rights Act and the Equal Protection clause of the 14th Amendment, contiguity, and compactness must be part of your deliberations, I would urge you also to allow competitiveness to be a factor in your decision-making.

The effect of true partisan competitiveness on a healthy democracy cannot be overstated: competition means that voters become better informed. Competition results in higher voter turnout.¹ It provides an a method of legitimizing the elected representatives,”² and therefore increases efficacy among voters. Competition checks corruption,³ and perhaps most importantly, competition mediates the behavior of incumbents, incentivizing members to work on a bipartisan basis.

In recent decades, we have seen the culmination of two forces on our democracy – the increasingly sophisticated partisan gerrymandering made possible with GIS mapmaking technology, and the self-sorting of American voters into homogenous distributions of like-minded voters, convinced of the rightness of their ways and the wrongness of others’.⁴

The result of intentional and unintentional gerrymandering has been that the number of competitive House districts in the United States has declined drastically. Using the Cook

¹ Blais Andre. 2000. *To Vote Or Not To Vote? The Merits and Limits of Rational Choice*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

² Issacharoff, Samuel. Why Elections? *Harvard Law Review*. (2002). 16:684-85.

³ Rose-Ackerman, Susan. 1999. Political Corruption and Democracy. *Connecticut Journal of International Law*. 14(2): 363–78

⁴ Chen, J., Rodden, J. (2013). Unintentional gerrymandering: Political geography and electoral bias in legislatures. *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, 8:239–269.

Political Reports PVI range of a D+5 to an R+5, the number of “swing seats” has declined from 164 in 1997 to 78 today.⁵ The number of R+5 has increased from 148 to 192 during that same time period, while the number of D+5s has increased from 123 to 165.⁶ When narrowing the PVI range, the number of truly competitive House races in the United States in 2020 dropped to 27—two of which were in New Jersey (in the CD2 in which the incumbent won by 4.7 percent and in the CD7).⁷

*When using FairVote’s methodology, which relies exclusively on prior voting patterns to make its predictions, partisanship has become the primary determinant of electoral outcomes, outweighing other factors including incumbency, money, name recognition, and candidate quality.*⁸

What this means is that typically, using this modeling, it is possible to predict the outcome of 82 percent of House races with a 99.7% percent accuracy before an opponent has even declared their candidacy.

*We know that today, voters are less likely to split their tickets, and only 16 congressional districts could be categorized as “cross over” districts, where voters voted for a presidential candidate of one party and a House candidate of the other. Just four years ago, there were double the number of cross over districts. In 1996, there were nearly seven times as many.*⁹

Those representing crossover districts – those nine Republicans in districts that Biden carried and seven Democrats in districts Trump carried – inevitably will be top targets of the opposing party’s congressional campaign committees.

The result of lack of competition is clear: Candidates and House members are penalized for bipartisanship, inclusion, compassion, and moderation. They are rewarded for vitriol and divisiveness. We get a polarized political system, where candidates embrace and are rewarded

⁵ <https://cookpolitical.com/analysis/national/pvi/introducing-2021-cook-political-report-partisan-voter-index>

⁶ From Cook Political Reports, regarding PVI calculations in 2020 with high VBMS: “Notes about PVI Data & Methodology: Following each election and round of redistricting, presidential results are compiled to generate PVI scores for each congressional district. In a few states, these results are aggregated by district by state and/or local election authorities. However, in others they are not, and the reported election results do not account for some votes that are reported centrally and not redirected back to the voter’s precinct. The record-shattering numbers of early and absentee ballots cast in 2020 compounded the challenge of allocating presidential results to districts in some states. Dave Leip’s Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections used best estimates in the case of split precincts and counties, splitting unallocated presidential votes in proportion to the party vote totals for congressional candidates where applicable.”

⁷ <https://www.270towin.com/2020-house-election/cook-political-2020-house-ratings>

⁸ <https://fairvote.app.box.com/s/uk2w2hklbg79maypvdx1ofntmr6jggcp>

⁹ <https://cookpolitical.com/analysis/national/pvi/introducing-2021-cook-political-report-partisan-voter-index>

for hyper-partisanship and extremism, where our Capitol is violently stormed, and where undermining the legitimacy of our elections is commonplace.

I am not suggesting that New Jersey's congressional districts be designed in a manner that would create 12 competitive districts. And I know that many of the members of this commission will argue for minimal disruption – a reality that will likely not be possible at the end of the day.

What I am suggesting is that true competitiveness – that is, districts that are drawn as close to the 50-50 mark as possible and are not drawn as “lean” districts – play an incredibly important role in fostering tolerance and bi-partisanship, in creating opportunities for dialogue among citizens of the opposite party, of creating candidates and House members who strive to address the needs of their constituents, rather than kowtow to the demands of party leaders in Washington, DC.

And so, Justice Wallace, I speak to you when I urge you not to be the “tie-breaker” on this commission, not merely to pick from the partisan menus presented to you that look out for the parochial interests of this House member or that political party. Instead, I urge you to be the *independent* member, the sole person on the commission charged with protecting the polity, and the voters – even those who may think that they want a gerrymandered map favoring their member – and encourage the members of this commission to present you with maps that include a significant number of truly competitive districts, which will serve the interests of the voters, the state, and our democracy.

Thank you.

Good evening everyone. My name is Chloe Soremekun.

I am currently living in Sicklerville, NJ. I previously lived in Blackwood, NJ and prior to Blackwood, I lived in Voorhees. I have family members who have lived in NJ for the last 2 decades which heavily influenced my decision to attend medical school here in the state of NJ. I have been studying at RowanSOM in Stratford, NJ for the last 3 years and have become more immersed in this community.

I am aware that as medical students, we are a very important piece of the culture and community, as evidenced by the COVID-19 vaccination roll out strongly supported by medical student volunteers who aided in the protection of our community from this preventable disease.

I am here to testify about the importance of representation today pertaining to the New Jersey Redistricting Commission. As a medical student at RowanSOM, I believe that it is really important that we are appropriately represented in the next round of maps. As a student doctor in training, it is very helpful to have one representative students can reach out to, to discuss federal funding for topics ranging from vaccine roll outs to tuition. Having multiple representatives splitting our community would make talking to representatives about these issues that matter to us, that much more challenging.

Outside of students or colleagues who live with their families or significant others, a decent majority of students reside in or around our RowanSOM Stratford campus in cities including but not limited to: Williamstown, Glassboro, Blackwood, Lindenwold, Sewell, Clementon and the Voorhees Township. My community is largely made up of diverse suburbs that share many similar issues & interests, encompassed geographically congruent with Congressional District 1.

Aside from my university campus, my community includes the surrounding Gloucester Premium Outlets, Truman Hall, Camden County College, Jefferson Stratford Hospital, the Lindenwold Patco/ NJ Transit Station, New Brooklyn Park and Timber Creek Dog Park.

Personally, I buy groceries in Sicklerville and Clementon. Infrequently, I eat out in Turnersville and Williamstown, NJ. Again, I am a medical student. I service my car in the Turnersville AutoMall.

The landscape which I have just shared with you is the community I am most familiar with, and the one in which I feel safe. Accordingly, I do not interact with regions beyond the regions I just mentioned. I would not want my community to be divided into multiple Congressional districts and subsequently combined with regions that I do not have strong connections to.

To sum this all up we are a close-knit, interdependent neighborly community. We certainly do not want to be masked and overlooked by the voices of surrounding districts that cannot relate to our everyday lived experiences. Please do not separate our community into separate districts which would not allow us to have appropriate representation to address concerns that are near and dear to our community members.

I would like to thank the Committee for listening to me today and ask that you keep my community together when drawing new maps to the extent it is possible, without diluting the voting power of communities of color, or otherwise violating the law / fair redistricting principles. Before I leave, I would like to thank the NJISJ and the NJ NAACP Youth Works Committee. Again, thank you for listening to my testimony today.

To whom it may concern,

Although I cannot join you on Monday, I thank you for the opportunity to speak into this important assignment. Our NJ district map is in serious need of redistributing the electorate. I know the state has more Democrats than Republicans but the current map had a most obvious goal of protecting the Democrat Party majority status. I certainly hope you can reach a goal of developing a map that does not divide communities and has an equal number of towns favoring each party. It would be wonderful if the balance of the districts could be divided so party affiliation numbers are as close to equal as possible. The challenge is not easy but is also not impossible.

Thank you for serving on the committee. May the assignment be well done.

Sincerely,
Mrs. Patricia Wenzel

West Milford, NJ 07480