

## On Lancaster County's new legislative voting districts [column]

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The Pennsylvania redistricting process ended up in the courts. Again. Voters across the commonwealth, good government groups and judges themselves did not want this outcome. All along, we feared the process wasn't up to the job. It should come as no surprise that partisan legislators have trouble negotiating; the process highlights and exacerbates their conflicts of interest.

Overall, I believe that the state House and Senate maps adopted by the Legislative Reapportionment Commission are better for the people of Pennsylvania than the legislative maps of the past two decades. Districts are more compact and split into fewer jurisdictions.

Meanwhile, I believe that the new congressional map adopted by the state Supreme Court last week is a good choice by every metric. It is balanced and doesn't favor one party or the other.

Mark Nordenberg, chair of the Legislative Reapportionment Commission, commented that the redistricting process is inherently political. While state Senate leaders on the commission, Republican Kim Ward and Democrat Jay Costa, worked together on the state Senate maps, they did not get much oversight from Nordenberg and his team.

The resulting state Senate map clearly shows that the protection of incumbents was an important criteria. Only one Senate district (out of 50) drew two current senators into the same district.

Walter Olson, a critic of gerrymandering and senior fellow at the libertarian Cato Institute, would call our new state Senate map "a buddymander," or "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours."

Incumbent protection seems to have driven how to best design Lancaster's Senate districts. Lancaster has a metropolitan core that's been defined by our county planning department for at least a decade. The new state Senate map splits the metro core into two districts that lean rural, with lots of farmland, making it harder for the voters who live in the metro core to elect a candidate who will be responsive to policies they care about.

It also creates a district that puts our northeastern municipalities into a somewhat sprawling district with all of Lebanon County and a large portion of Berks County. We don't know why the lines were drawn this way.

The People's Map submitted to the Legislative Reapportionment Commission by Fair Districts PA shows that Lancaster County could have had compact and responsive state Senate districts for *all* communities in the county. It created three districts: one for the metro core, one north and west of the core, and one south. The southern district did reach into Chester County, but it was compact and kept farming communities in both counties together.

Unfortunately, by prioritizing incumbent protection in the state Senate map, Lancaster's metro core will yet again have decreased voting power — for a decade.

With regard to the state House map, Republican House Majority Leader Kerry Benninghoff and House Democratic Leader Joanna McClinton did not collaborate on one map, but instead shared their partisan preferences and sample maps with the Legislative Reapportionment Commission Chair Nordenberg and his team, which drew one map to reflect those differences.

The Legislative Reapportionment Commission House map for Lancaster County created two districts that will give voting power to communities in the metro core — allowing them to elect candidates who are responsive to those communities.

I believe that Nordenberg did a commendable job at remaining neutral and providing a lot more transparency than came from the congressional redistricting process. His team solicited and weighed extensive public comment (receiving over 6,000 entries) and carefully explained reasoning for choosing the maps he chose. This made his considerations transparent.

Nonetheless, state legislators had a lot of control on how lines were drawn and who the lines would protect. Additionally, the congressional map journey shows that the process is still a problem.

In 10 years we will do this again. It is long past time to enact legislation that removes legislators from the map-drawing process and implement a solution that meets the high bar of being a transparent and citizen-driven process. The Legislative Reapportionment Commission came close. The congressional map-drawing process tried, but in the end failed.