

Senators Brooks and Folmer:

First, some thanks are in order. Thank you to Senator Brooks for relaying our concerns on to your colleague on the Senate State Government Committee. I know you have not yet taken a position on Senate Bill 22, but your willingness to speak to Senator Folmer and pass on the support of your constituents is a testament to your dedication as a representative of your constituents. I look forward to speaking with you directly about this Bill.

Thank you to Senator Folmer and your entire Committee for holding transparent hearings and taking testimony on Senate Bill 22, as well as for listening to the desires of Pennsylvanians from outside your district. Your openness to considering Senate Bill 22, to addressing the gerrymandering problem, and to hearing concerns of citizens outside your district is a great example for how our government should work; in stark contrast to your counterparts in the House State Government Committee.

Senate Bill 22 has broad support in Crawford County. I have personally spoken to dozens of my fellow citizens. I have spoken with Democrats, Republicans, and Independents. With the exception of one person, Representative Roae, everyone I have spoken with is very supportive of this Bill. There are multiple groups of citizens in the County, some affiliated with Fair Districts PA and some purely grassroots groups with no affiliation, who have come together to support Senate Bill 22.

All of us believe Senate Bill 22 is about fairness. It is about removing control from political parties that get mired in partisan gridlock and from party leadership who use their power to keep their members “in line.” For too long, politicians in Pennsylvania have been able to decide, in secret, which voters they want to have in their districts by moving district lines.

This goes against our belief as Pennsylvanians and Americans in fairness. It goes against our belief that all power of the government should be derived from We the People. It goes against our belief that our representatives in government should be responsive to the People. Senate Bill 22 gives control back to the People.

Some politicians question what we mean by fairness. Fairness means we have a process that does not rely on the people who directly benefit from the decision they reach. In the case of gerrymandering, politicians (or party leadership) make districting decisions that benefit themselves. The process should leave political affiliation completely out of the equation, and subsequent enabling legislation can make that happen. The process will not be perfect, but it will be open, transparent, and not motivated by immediate self-interest.

Some politicians argue that voters can vote against legislators who create districts with which they do not agree. They claim that legislators are responsive to their constituents. While we each have a vote, this argument is hiding the ball. Voters are not allowed to know what factors the politicians considered when determining how the districts are drawn. In the recent court case, citizens asked for information on how the General Assembly came up with districts such as the PA 7th. The legislative leadership said that the citizens are not entitled to that information. The Commonwealth Court agreed. How do citizens know whether they should vote against incumbent politicians when the politicians get to make decisions behind closed doors?

When politicians choose their voters by manipulating district lines into absurdity, they guarantee their own re-election. The politicians move the lines to include their supporters and remove their opponents from their district. It is quite literally, the politicians choosing their voters. When politicians can use a secret system to guarantee they win, the power to vote out the politicians is an illusion.

Some politicians believe a college professor will be the person who creates the map. That is because the politicians do not trust us. Those politicians have been in the General Assembly for too long if they think a random group of citizens from various parts of the state and various political backgrounds do not have any common sense. Partisan gridlock is how politicians work. It is not how We the People work.

Consider a jury trial. Twelve random strangers come together to make life or death decisions because those types of decisions should be in the hands of the People and not in the government. In 94% of cases, those random strangers are able to reach a unanimous decision. Senate Bill 22 does not require a unanimous decision. It only requires 7 of 11 and at least one member from each political party.

In other states, citizens' commissions have worked. Why would Pennsylvanians fail where Arizonans or Californians or others have succeeded? We the People have a common sense that the bureaucrats and politicians lack.

Even if the commission is unable to reach an agreement on a map, the fallback is the same process we have now. The Supreme Court appoints a special master to draw the map. The special master is someone with extensive education and training in this type of work. Even more important, the special master has no direct interest in the decision he makes.

If you believe secrecy by the government is good, if you believe politicians should be able to guarantee their own re-elections, if you think partisan gridlock helps us, if you believe politicians and bureaucrats are smarter than your constituents, then you should vote against Senate Bill 22.

But, if you believe that partisan politics is responsible for gridlock in government, if you believe that voters should elect their representatives, if you believe that political parties should not be involved in creating congressional districts, if you believe government should be open and accountable, if you believe that citizens are smarter than political leadership and bureaucrats, then you should vote for Senate Bill 22.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely



Brian T. Cagle
Meadville, PA