

Testimony of Mary Gaiski
Dauphin County Resident
Before
PA House of Representatives Majority Policy Committee
South Central PA Policy Hearing on State Legislative Redistricting
January 11, 2022
Upper Allen Township Building
Mechanicsburg, PA

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, I appreciate the opportunity to testify today before the committee in regard to the state-wide legislative redistricting plan.

My name is Mary Gaiski and I have lived in Dauphin County since I was 5 years old. First living in Harrisburg and then Lower Paxton Township and now Halifax Township. My comments today are as a resident of Dauphin County. I have a unique perspective because I have lived on both the south side and now the north side of Peter's Mountain and I fully understand how geography can impact a person's perspective and even more so when leadership is not responsive to the people.

When I first viewed the maps, I thought oh no, here we go again. It seems every time there is a redistricting, upper Dauphin County the most rural part of the county gets passed around as an afterthought. I moved to Halifax in 1994 after meeting my husband. As I became familiar with the other residents of the area, many who were lifelong residents like my husband, I constantly heard complaints that they were the forgotten end of the county – leaders in the county and in state government did not care about their needs or their community. They complained about the need for better roads, quicker access to health care and help with economic development due to rising property taxes.

This has changed in the last fourteen years when we were graced with a legislator who had no problem crossing the mountain, engaging with the people, and understanding the rural communities of the upper end. Representative Sue Helm listens to our needs and does everything she can to solve our problems. She has given the residents of Upper Dauphin a strong voice in the county and within state government. So much so, that when the people started hearing of the changes my phone and emails lit up with complaints about the proposed changes. Their biggest concern is that they will lose what they have gained and their voice with the leaders at the county and state level will become muted once again.

Dauphin county is a diverse county, and its people need to remain unified since local decisions are many times influenced by county or state mandates. The people in the northern end rely greatly on the businesses and services south of the Peter's Mountain, this is obvious if you travel Routes 147 or 225 at 7am or 5pm, Monday through Friday. Commuting in this traffic tells me there is a shared interest between the upper and lower ends of Dauphin County.

When communities are carved up to be combined with areas that do not share similar county leadership, the people lose because information is not properly passed on and if they are the minority, they do not have the voting power to bring about change to make sure their needs and interests are

well represented. I am not using minority in the sense of political affiliation; I am using it in the sense of one local body will have a majority over another local body so the needs of the local body with the largest voting block will be met while smaller communities continue to feel left out or disenfranchised.

School districts are determined by local boundaries and local governments are responsible for maintaining services that interact with people's everyday life such as police protection, emergency services, and the upkeep of recreational areas. This will become very cumbersome for local leaders who rely greatly on county and state initiatives and funding.

The proposed map splits the City of Harrisburg, combining parts of it with their neighbors across the Susquehanna River in Camp Hill, East Pennsboro and Lemoyne – communities that do not share the same school districts and who differ greatly when it comes to local needs and challenges. The City of Harrisburg, the largest local government body in Dauphin County, needs to be kept together so that their local leaders have one person to work with when needs rise to the county and state level. Again, splitting it between two dilutes the message and may give it less of a priority in one area over another. The same goes for the largest municipality in the county, Lower Paxton, the proposed map splits this municipality. For the sake of continuity, the people of Lower Paxton need to be represented by one legislator as they are represented by one local government body and law enforcement entity.

These two points are a glaring example of the commission greatly missing their duties in the PA Constitution to avoid splits and keep districts compact. The combining of Harrisburg with west shore communities shows to me that the map drawers definitely did not take into consideration their charge of understanding communities of interest. These maps do not put the people of Dauphin County first!

The goals should be 1- keep communities together to preserve shared interests, 2- keep school districts intact; and 3- respect local governments and their resources. For those of us in Dauphin County it is done by using Route 322, the connector of the upper end to the lower end as a boundary and when carving out districts within the county, to keep our two largest government entities in the same district.

Again, I thank you for this opportunity to express my thoughts.