



Redistricting Reform Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Why is Fair Districts PA supporting SB 22 and HB 722 rather than any of the other redistricting reform bills?

A. SB 22 and HB 722 are the result of lengthy discussions and negotiation among a variety of parties interested in meaningful reform, drawing on input from election reform analysts and citizens involved in successful reform efforts in several other states. FDPA believes these identical bills include some key reforms that are not found in other proposals:

- (1) random selection of commission members from pre-qualified lists of voters;
- (2) a prohibition against appointing lobbyists, government officials or their family members; and
- (3) a transparent redistricting process that encourages public input.

Q. The people calling for reform are mostly voters unhappy with the 2016 Presidential election results. These bills won't change that.

A. It's true that many people were energized by the 2016 election, including Democrats, Republicans and others. People are also concerned by what they perceive as inaction by their elected representatives and an inability or unwillingness to work across party lines. When people look for the root causes of those problems, they inevitably conclude that gerrymandering is at the top of the list and must be stopped.

Q. Gerrymandering has been around a long time. Why are we just hearing about this now?

A. Gerrymandering has been part of the political process for centuries but by any measure it has become far worse in recent decades. New mapping and data-mining technologies allow mappers to predict district outcomes with great precision in a way that increasingly deprives

voters of choice. **While squiggly lines are not the problem, districts that unnecessarily divide counties and townships or wrap around each other in odd ways are clear indicators of partisan intent.** Voters believe these districts undermine accountability and protect unresponsive incumbents. While some organizations involved with Fair Districts PA have been working on this since the 1990s, many more citizens are just now becoming aware of the need for reform before the 2020 census.

Q. You can't take politics out of the redistricting process. Even the courts have recognized that political motivation doesn't make a redistricting plan invalid.

A. These bills are designed to minimize the influence of political motivations and to create districts that respect existing county and municipal boundaries. When you look at what gerrymandering has done to state legislative and congressional districts in Pennsylvania, the status quo is indefensible. An independent citizens commission could not possibly do worse.

Q. The problem isn't gerrymandering, it's geography. You have large urban areas with mostly Democrats and large rural areas with a lot of Republicans. Changing the process won't change the result.

A. While there is some truth to that, it's possible to measure the impact of geographic vs. intentional partisan gerrymandering, and by those measure Pennsylvania's distorted districts go far beyond the impact of geographic clustering. By every measure, PA's districts show that the process has ignored existing municipal boundaries. The goal of reform is not to change the results of elections, but to end the practices that have been used by both political parties to perpetuate power and protect incumbents.

Q. Why are these bills better than the current system? Legislators are accountable to the voters, while the Commission members would not be.

A. Under the current system, the plans are developed by a small number of legislative leaders from each caucus, dominated by whichever party is in the majority. Those leaders are not accountable to voters in the districts being gerrymandered. SB 22 and HB 722 require the General Assembly to determine the qualifications of members of the independent commission, so the enabling legislation could include appropriate accountability safeguards.

Q. How will the Commission be independent if the Secretary of State – a political appointee – will be involved in the process?

A. As the Commonwealth's chief elections officer, the Secretary is a logical choice because his department is already involved in overseeing our elections. He and his staff have expertise in this area and are required by law to promote the integrity of the electoral process. The role of the Secretary of State in selecting the commissioners, as defined by these amendments, would be administrative. Enabling legislation will define in detail the qualifications of

commissioners, specifics regarding how the opportunity would be advertised and the pools of candidates created. Such legislation would also describe in detail the randomized process of selection, most likely a computer algorithm designed to ensure the demographic diversity of the commission.

Q. Why do independent and third-party voters only get three seats on the new independent commission?

A. The division of membership among the major political parties and other groups was intended to prevent any one political group from dominating the process. The exact numbers of unaffiliated and third-party voters will change over time, so it's difficult to identify the correct proportion for their membership on the Commission. The bills do require that the final redistricting plan be approved by a super-majority, including at least one vote from each group, to ensure that no one person from any group can hijack or stall the process.

Q. Why do the bills allow redistricting to be done by a Special Master if the Commission is unable to agree on a plan? Isn't there a risk that person will be politically biased?

A. The Special Master would be appointed by the PA Supreme Court in the rare situation where the Redistricting Commission is unable to agree on a plan. Special Masters are commonly used in many different areas of law when courts need to rely on individuals with specialized expertise to advise them. It is important to note that the Special Master would be bound by the same rules and standards that apply to the Commission itself. Also, the Special Master would not act unilaterally; his plan would have to be approved by the Supreme Court before it could take effect.

Q. Have other states enacted similar laws? Have they resulted in more even election results?

A. According to research by Common Cause, six states have citizen commissions (AK, AZ, CA, ID, MT and WA) and redistricting reform legislation is pending in at least 13 other states, including PA.

The best measure of success of these laws is not how the elections turned out after reform was adopted. The goal is to end a process that currently allows the party in control to solidify power at the expense of minority parties and unaffiliated voters, and that allows the major political parties to carve up districts to protect incumbents of both parties.

Q. How is Fair Districts PA organized and where do they get their financial support?

A. FDPA is a coalition of individuals and organizations begun in early 2016 by Common Cause PA, the League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania, Committee of Seventy, Pennsylvania

Council of Churches and other groups concerned about our increasingly unresponsive legislature. Since then, thousands of supporters, hundreds of volunteers and dozens of other organizations have joined the effort. There are now dozens of local groups in counties across the state.

Funding comes from in-state, individual donations and the support of our publicly endorsing organizations. Legally, Fair Districts PA functions under the fiscal sponsorship of the League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania. FDPA co-founder and chair Carol Kuniholm has been election reform specialist on the board of the LWVPA since June of 2015. FDPA's other co-founder, Barry Kauffman, was executive director of Common Cause PA for almost three decades, leaving that role and his involvement with FDPA in December 2016.

Q. Is FDPA associated with any of the groups sending anonymous postcards and using other questionable tactics?

A. This issue of gerrymandering has caught the attention of a large number of very diverse groups. Some of them have endorsed FDPA and our guiding principles. All our communications on this issue will clearly identify who we are and you will not see us using any tactics that attempt to disguise where they are coming from. There are other groups out there that have good intentions, but have chosen to use different tactics, which we do not necessarily endorse. Hopefully, your concerns about some of these other groups and tactics will not prevent you from considering the need for redistricting reform on its own merits.

Are there questions we've missed? Answers you think need more detail? Email questions and suggestions to Advocacy@FairDistrictsPA.com.