

Pennsylvania legislators have once again let down state citizens who want fair voting districts. On June 22, the Senate State Government Committee voted on the Legislative and Congressional Redistricting Act (LACRA/SB 222), a bill written to emphasize transparency, public input and clear, measurable criteria in the redistricting process. The chairperson of the committee, Senator David Argall, gutted the bill, eliminating any mention of PA state and house legislative districts and added an amendment addressing only congressional districts. When asked by a senator on the committee why the bill as originally written wouldn't be given a vote, Senator Argall replied that we can't expect to get a "full loaf" on redistricting reform.

This is an insult to PA citizens and good government groups who support reform. As Fair Districts PA states on its website "bills to create an independent citizen redistricting commission were stalled, blocked, amended beyond recognition, gutted and buried across the past three sessions. LACRA was an attempt to provide a compromise remedy." LACRA let the legislators keep a role in the process. Voters would get a few slices of the loaf – transparency, public input and measurable criteria in the redistricting process.

Over the past year SB 222 was scrutinized by the Princeton Gerrymandering Project and supported by the League of Women Voters, Common Cause and the Committee of Seventy. It was the subject of more than 200 meetings between legislators and their constituents. The bill had 25 co-sponsors in the PA Senate. But the Senate State Government Committee had less than 24 hours to review Senator Argall's amendment. The meeting took less than 30 minutes (2 other bills were considered during that short time). The drastically altered SB 222 was voted out of committee along party lines. There will not be a vote in the full Senate because the PA General Assembly has adjourned until the end of September.

Drawing voting district lines for the next ten years begins this Fall following the release of the 2020 Census data. Legislators should be aware that voters are watching this process closely.