

## A RESOLUTION CALLING FOR FAIR REDISTRICTING REFORM IN PENNSYLVANIA

WHEREAS: Christians are called by scripture to “Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy” (Proverbs 31:8-9). We believe that in a good society, those with political authority have a responsibility to provide justice for all; and

WHEREAS: Elected officials are entrusted with managing the shared resources of the people and ensuring that decisions are made with justice and transparency. We believe government has an especially significant role in protecting those who are weak and vulnerable—those who are unable to protect themselves; and

WHEREAS: The Council has long been aware of the distortions of power and the inordinate role of money within governing structures<sup>i</sup>; and

<sup>ii</sup>WHEREAS: Article II, Section 16 of the Pennsylvania Constitution states that House and Senate districts “**shall be composed of compact and contiguous territory as nearly equal in population as practicable**” and that “**(un)less absolutely necessary no county, city, incorporated town, borough, township or ward shall be divided in forming either a senatorial or representative district**”; and

WHEREAS: Article II, Section 17 of the Pennsylvania Constitution provides that Pennsylvania House and Senate districts be drawn by a five-member redistricting commission. Four of these are the majority and minority leaders of the Pennsylvania House and Senate. These four then select a fifth member to serve as the commission chair. If the four cannot agree, then the Pennsylvania Supreme Court appoints a chair. The commission has exclusive authority to draw the maps; and

WHEREAS: Recent redistricting plans have ignored the requirements of Article II, Section 16, slicing townships, school districts and wards, and snaking across multiple counties in attempts to divide voter groups; and

WHEREAS: The 2010-11 redistricting process resulted in multiple lawsuits that cost Pennsylvania millions of dollars in legal fees and caused confusion among voters and election officials waiting for appeals to be decided; and

WHEREAS: In most democratic nations, political maps are drawn by neutral administrative groups with no vested interest in electoral outcomes; and

WHEREAS: In the case *Arizona State Legislature v. Arizona Independent Redistricting Commission* (2015), the U.S. Supreme Court found that that the problem of partisan gerrymandering could be addressed by the use of an independent commission, as the state had done since 2000<sup>iii</sup>; and

WHEREAS: The United States District Court for the Western District of Wisconsin found that the Wisconsin Legislature’s 2011 redrawing of State Assembly districts to favor Republicans was an unconstitutional partisan gerrymander, violating both the First Amendment and the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment because it aimed to deprive Democratic voters of their right to be represented. It was significant in that some election-law scholars said the ruling offered, for the first time, a clear mathematical formula for measuring partisanship in a district, something that had been missing in previous attempts to address gerrymandering<sup>iv</sup>; and

WHEREAS: The effectiveness of impartial commissions depends on the following key provisions (identified by Fair Districts PA): (1) a carefully defined selection process to ensure a capable and demographically representative commission; (2) safeguards to maintain independence and impartiality; (3) clearly defined redistricting standards; (4) opportunities for public input; and (5) real transparency; and

WHEREAS: A wide range of advocates in Pennsylvania (working through Fair Districts PA) support creation of an independent citizen redistricting commission that follows these provisions as an essential step toward fair, transparent and accountable elections.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT

RESOLVED (1): The Pennsylvania Council of Churches supports the creation of an independent citizen redistricting commission based on the key provisions identified by Fair Districts PA; and be it further

RESOLVED (2): The Council instructs the Director of Advocacy and Ecumenical Outreach to: (a) urge elected officials and policymakers, in cooperation with Fair Districts PA and other good government advocates throughout Pennsylvania, to create an independent citizen redistricting commission; and (b) communicate this resolution to the Governor of Pennsylvania, the Speaker of the House, the President of the Senate, the chairs of the appropriate House and Senate Committees, and to all Senators and Representatives in Pennsylvania's General Assembly; and be it further

RESOLVED (3): The Council encourages its member bodies to:

- Seek adherence to denominational resolutions on the support of fair redistricting similar to this Resolution;
- Provide educational materials and resources to their congregations to make them aware of, and to educate them about the benefits of fair redistricting in providing greater power to Pennsylvania voters/citizens in choosing their legislators and achieving advocacy successes in areas of greatest concern to the faith community; and
- Encourage congregations and individuals to seek enactment of legislation and policies that seek to achieve fair redistricting in Pennsylvania.

Approved by the Board of Directors of the Pennsylvania Council of Churches on this 4th day of April, 2017.

*Rev. Elizabeth L. Bidgood Enders*

The Rev. Elizabeth Bidgood Enders, President  
Board of Directors  
Pennsylvania Council of Churches

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<sup>i</sup> Here is a sampling of articles that talk about the role of money in Pennsylvania politics:

[http://www.pennlive.com/news/2016/04/unlimited\\_campaign\\_contributio.html](http://www.pennlive.com/news/2016/04/unlimited_campaign_contributio.html);

<http://www.mcall.com/news/nationworld/pennsylvania/mc-pa-political-corruption-legislature-allentown-20160511-story.html>;

<http://www.cityandstatepa.com/content/political-influence-pennsylvania>;

<http://www.commoncause.org/states/pennsylvania/research-and-reports/marcellus-money-report-2015.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> All but two of the following "WHEREAS" statements are copied or adapted from sources on the Fair Districts PA website ([www.fairdistrictspa.com](http://www.fairdistrictspa.com)). The two statements referring to court decisions are end-noted separately.

<sup>iii</sup> <http://www.scotusblog.com/case-files/cases/arizona-state-legislature-v-arizona-independent-redistricting-commission/>

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/21/us/wisconsin-redistricting-found-to-unfairly-favor-republicans.html>