



This morning in Harrisburg, a Republican-led committee once again voted against the people's will. House Bill 722 would have created an independent commission to draw our state's legislative and congressional map. Why is this necessary? Because in PA, whoever is the majority party has the power to draw the maps, leading to the unfair districts which silence the voices of votes.

Gerrymandering in our state has become a hot topic this year, as the state Supreme Court struck down the previously drawn Congressional maps. HB722 addressed the Congressional maps as well as those of our state house and senate districts, which are also drawn in such ways to benefit the party in charge at the time of drawing.

HB722 had dozens of co-sponsors from both parties: enough that had it made it out of committee, it would have passed the House.

The hearing this morning was held at the last minute with very little public notice or transparency. And here's why: although the original bill's intent was to make the map-drawing process more fair, more transparent, and in the hands of citizens, the committee chairman, Rep. Daryl Metcalfe, R-Butler, completely stripped that language and replaced it with his own. The chairman's bill would keep the commission in the legislature and give the ruling party a 4-2 majority on the commission. Remember: the original bill was supported by both Democrats and Republicans around the state, had dozens of co-sponsors, and the chairman himself said he had been lobbied to advance it but would refuse to.

Why are our representatives acting so secretly and refusing to listen to the people?

Rep Judy Ward, R-Blair, candidate for the Republican party's nomination in the 30th Senatorial District voted for the chairman's amendment. In the process, she ignored the voices from her district who have been lobbying her to support the original HB722 for a fair and independent commission. Instead, she has chosen to dig her heels in and advance a bill that was brought to the commission in a secretive way, that is not at all what was initially intended, and that is against the interests of her current and potential constituents in her district.

Unfortunately, this is what the people of Pennsylvania have come to expect from our lawmakers. But we shouldn't accept it any longer. The elections in November 2018 give us a chance to vote out these lawmakers who, again and again, choose to vote for laws that keep them in power instead of improving the lives, and the representation, of their constituents. Whether through the drawing of maps or through the lobbyists' and corporate funding that funds campaigns, our so-called representatives care only about staying in power and receiving the benefits of their high paid salaries, benefits, and pensions, not about improving the lives of their constituents.

Voters deserve to choose their representatives, not vice versa. As a state senator, I will support an independent commission to draw our legislative and congressional districts. I will not support secretive committee meetings. I will represent my constituents openly, transparently, honestly. Our representatives answer to us, and their work should not be conducted behind closed doors, or at the last minute. Their work should be transparent, and it should benefit us as the constituents. We deserve better, in our district and across the state.