Written Testimony

House State Government Committee Hearing

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Good Afternoon Members of the House State Government Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in today's hearing. My name is Jennifer Shultz, and I am the Data Services Manager for the Pennsylvania State Data Center (PaSDC). We are the Commonwealth's Official Source for Population and Socio-Economic Statistics as part of the State Data Center Program – a federal/state cooperative program with the U.S. Census Bureau. We were established in 1981 by Executive Order of the Governor and are located at Penn State Harrisburg in Middletown within the Institute of State and Regional Affairs.

The Census Bureau released the Apportionment counts from the 2020 Decennial Census on April 26, 2021. Pennsylvania's apportionment population count for 2020 is 13,011,844. This resulted in a loss of one seat in the House of Representatives for Pennsylvania. The state's resident population count is 13,002,700, ranking it 5th among the states. This is a 2.4% increase from the 2010 Census count. This is a smaller increase than was seen in previous decades when the state's population increased by 3.4%.

The Role of PaSDC in Redistricting

The PaSDC was chosen by the Legislative Data Processing Center (LDPC) to provide Geographic Information Systems (GIS) support during the 2020 Census Redistricting Data Program. We began our work in 2017 for Phase 2 of the Redistricting Data Program, the Voting District Project. This program provides states the opportunity to delineate voting districts and to suggest census block boundaries for use in the 2020 Census redistricting data tabulations. Phase 2 included three parts: Initial Identification of Updates, Verification of Updates, and Verification of Updates II[i] . In addition, we will provide GIS support for Phase 3 of the Redistricting Data Program, Delivery of the 2020 Census Redistricting Data Files and Geographic Products.

Phase 2:
During each part of Phase 2, we worked with counties, LDPC and the Department of State (DOS) to collect and verify voting district boundaries, codes and names and submit this data to the Census Bureau. We requested a shapefile of the voting district boundaries from each county by contacting the county's election officials and the county GIS staff. ESRI Shapefiles are a geographic data file format that, for our use, represent boundaries such as voting districts and counties. This was the requested format by the U.S. Census Bureau to deliver data for this program.

We compared the files received from the county against the U.S. Census Bureau's to identify areas that needed updating. We verified the updates with the Department of State and updated the shapefiles for submission to the Census Bureau. We also compared the names and codes across the files from the U.S. Census Bureau, the county, LDPC and DOS. We submitted the updated county shapefiles to the Census Bureau. The final submission for this phase was on March 31, 2020.

Phase 3:
Following the final verification, we monitored the delays in Census timelines and contacted the counties about anticipated changes to prioritize our work and determine the frequency of contact needed to prepare for receipt of the Redistricting Data Files and Geographic Products from Census. The Census data was expected to be delivered by April 1, 2021. However, on April 13, 2020, the Census Bureau announced that due to delays caused by COVID-19, the 2020 Census data would be delayed until July 31, 2021. This delivery was pushed back further to September 30, 2021. The Census Bureau also noted that it will provide the data in "legacy" data format in mid-to-late August.

When the U.S. Census Bureau delivers the official P.L. 94-171 data, LDPC and PaSDC will review this dataset and apply adjustments if necessary. This adjusted data is then certified by the Legislative Reapportionment Commission. We are preparing for the data release and working with LDPC to identify work that can be completed in advance. The Census Bureau released the 2020 Census Geographic Data Products for Pennsylvania in February 2021. The Census Bureau has also provided a prototype "legacy" summary file. We have developed SAS programs to process this "legacy" file format which allow us to process and format the final data more quickly.

In 2011, adjustments were made to the Census P.L. 94-171 data. There were four types of adjustments made:

1. Adjustments for alterations to election precincts that occurred after the completion of Phase 2 of the Voting District Project
2. Adjustments for split blocks that occur when there is a discrepancy between the Census Burau's voting district boundary and the state's voting district boundary.
3. Corrections for census block coding errors.
4. Corrections for incorrect codes and names.

To prepare for these adjustments, we are currently reviewing the Geographic Data Products and contacting counties and DOS to identify and verify potential changes. We are developing additional GIS and SAS scripts to preprocess the data and run comparisons between the mid-August and September 30th releases. These scripts will produce the final work product and serve as a final quality control safeguard.

By working with LDPC to prepare and develop these processes, we anticipate completing the adjusted data file by mid-October 2021.

Thank you again for the opportunity to participate in today's hearing.

[i] Redistricting Data Program Voting District Project - https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/about/rdo/program-management.html#P2