

Written-only Testimony for Thursday, August 12, 2021 in Overland Park
From: Troy Spain
To: The Joint House and Senate Committees on Redistricting
Re: Fair & Equitable Representation in Kansas

Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to supply testimony in support of transparent and fair redistricting.

I will break my suggestions into three parts. The first, ways to improve this process going forward to increase transparency and access; second, are rules that should be adopted; and third, concerns based on geographic and demographic communities I live in.

Firstly, I believe the only fair way to draw maps is a nonpartisan commission using an open algorithmic based model. The group could account for communities of interest and have final say after numerous well-advertised and accessible meetings occurred. Those additional meetings should be after census data is available, processed, and with ample guidance.

Second, the committee should adopt rules that do not protect incumbents. Rules should not allow partisan or incumbent information into the mapmaking software and instead use only census numbers and demographics along with natural and man-made borders to determine districts. This would help rebuild the reputation of this legislature after the ridiculous and unpatriotic comments of its former leadership encouraging gerrymandering to favor an already strong political position.

Third, most personally to me, are the communities I am part of. I live in a working-class neighborhood in Johnson County. Despite statements to the contrary made by committee members people where I live can't just take off work without much notice to give testimony. I am privileged enough to be able to do so but in my former work managing a retail establishment a single week's notice would not have been sufficient for a time-off request nor would the employee be paid for that time off unless they used some other benefit they had like sick time. My family and neighborhood also include a lot of English as a second language Spanish speakers. Without access to translations and interpreters' their voices are silenced in this conversation because the topics are complex, despite their enthusiasm to be part of the process as both citizens and patriots.

The community I first when asked about where I belong is that of the LGBTQ+ community. As a queer parent I am proud to live in a state with more queer parents than the national average, in Johnson and Wyandotte counties I find resources to support my family from the continuous barrage of straight oriented parenting barriers like: filling out antiquated school forms, being denied accommodations while we travel due to my sexuality, or explaining to my children why some of their friends' parents won't let their children play with mine because of who we love. I am proud to currently be represented in the Kansas House and U.S. House by people who identify as part of this community. While I do not believe their seats should be protected because they are incumbents, I do believe my Metro area, with all its queer resources, should remain in a single U.S. House district (3rd) and that my diverse neighborhood in Lenexa (23rd) should remain as similar as possible as its representation matches its community demographics.

I appreciate your time and am available for follow up on these areas at any time.

Troy Spain

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