

Written-Only Testimony for Overland Park, KS Redistricting Hearing
Thursday August 12, 2021, 1:45 to 3 PM

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Dear Kansas Legislative Redistricting Committee Members and Staff:

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on behalf of creating a fair and open redistricting process free of partisan gerrymandering. There have been many statements by elected officials in this State that have caused concern that the redistricting process will be manipulated for political advantage. In order for this process to build public trust, it must be conducted in a fair, open, and transparent manner with adequate time for public input. It is frustrating that the 14 redistricting town halls have been scheduled into one week – with a majority of the town halls taking place during the day while most concerned citizens are at work. Additionally, the short notice provided for the town hall schedule did not allow ample time for concerned citizens to rearrange their schedules to attend the meeting in their district.

An additional concern is that every one of these meetings is being conducted prior to the release of the Census Bureau's detailed population counts needed to draw new districts and the adoption of Guidelines and Criteria for Congressional and Legislative Redistricting (Guidelines). The ability to review the updated Census data and the Guidelines is needed for all of us involved in this process before providing our thoughts on the composition of new districts. It deeply concerns me that this process is being packed into one week as compared to 2011 when hearings were conducted in the same cities over the course of four months, from July to October - and only two of those hearings were held before the Legislature and public had the complete Census data. This rushed schedule does not provide Kansans with an open and transparent process.

I have lived in the Kansas Third District for 34 years. I think of Johnson and Wyandotte Counties as part of the Kansas City metro area – not as separate entities. Although I live in Johnson County, my health care providers are in Wyandotte County at the KU Medical Center. I visit restaurants in both counties and shop in both counties. I enjoy attending Sporting Kansas City soccer games – they are my hometown team despite being located in Wyandotte County.

As I am sure you are aware, Kansas's Third District currently represents the most racially diverse communities in the state, and these communities deserve to be kept in one district for fair representation. Splitting like-minded voters across multiple districts will dilute their voting power. Separating pieces of the region and combining them with more rural parts of the state does not respect the different priorities and needs of urban, suburban, and rural communities in the state. The needs of the residents of Johnson and Wyandotte

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Counties are dissimilar from those of rural communities. Each region deserves to have representation that acknowledges and understands their constituents. I grew up in Wichita, but my parents were from a small town in central Kansas and my mother grew up on a farm. There were many discussions in our family about the differing needs of farmers and small-town residents versus urban and suburban dwellers. The discussions were passionate at times....providing me with an appreciation and value for the needs of all communities in Kansas.

Kansas is not Kansas without the rural, suburban, and urban areas of our state. We all contribute to the unique and diverse tapestry that comprises this beautiful place. The current districts do not need drastic changes. Because Kansas will maintain its four existing congressional districts, the congressional maps should remain similar to their current configuration, as minimal modifications will likely be needed to address changes in Census data.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony. I understand that this testimony will become a public record and be published to the Kansas Legislative Research Department (KLRD) website the morning of the Town Hall. I appreciate your service and your thoughtfulness as you determine the most equitable path forward for redistricting in Kansas.

Respectfully,

Anne Melia
Prairie Village, KS