



**Written testimony from Amber Stenger  
League of Women Voters of Johnson County**

**Date: August 12, 2021**

**Hearing Location: Kansas City Kansas Community College, KCK**

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**This testimony is both written and spoken.**

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Mr. Chair and members of the committee,

Thank you for allowing me and others from the community to speak about the importance of redistricting and elevating the voices of our communities. The League of Women Voters is an organization that, for over 100 years, has fought to protect and strengthen our democracy and ensure full participation and access in the process. The redistricting work that this committee has been charged with is a central part of our democracy. We are submitting this testimony to ensure that maps drawn in the 2021 redistricting cycle fairly represent our community and that the redistricting process itself is equitable and transparent.

We have seen how improper redistricting has distorted and undermined the central values of our representative democracy. All maps drawn should be drawn in the interest of the people and communities they serve, and not, as is often the case, to protect the power of few. The gerrymandering of communities has stolen their power and guarantees the suppression of their voices.

The first ingredient to creating fair maps is 2020 Census data. In the absence of detailed 2020 Census data, we cannot determine the composition of fair districts at this time. However, we would like to point out two aspects of past redistricting practices in Kansas that should not be continued.

First, we urge the committee to reject the proposed redistricting guideline that reads, "Contests between incumbent members of the Legislature or the State Board of Education will be avoided whenever possible." The guideline appears to be aimed at incumbent protection, which may lead to unfairness in future elections. Similarly, the committee should see to it that incumbent legislators' home addresses are not included in the redistricting database.

Second, the committee should end the practice of including election results and/or voter registration information in the redistricting database. The only reason for such data to be available to mapmakers is to allow them to pick and choose "safe" areas for inclusion in new districts. The League has long held that practices such as these stand in the way of creating fair districts.

Finally, we request that the committee expands and extends its "Listening Tours." The League appreciates the committee's willingness to devote days to listening across the state as has been done in the past. But the current tour announced with short advance notice makes it hard for

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many Kansans to prepare and present pertinent information that will help you in your deliberations.

Likewise, no one, including yourselves, has had an opportunity to see detailed 2020 Census results and assess how our districts must change to maintain equality of population. Kansans deserve an opportunity to study the Census results for their communities in the context of the committee's guidelines and then engage the committees in meaningful conversations about the composition of new districts.

We urge you to consider the obstacles created by rushing through these initial hearings. We ask that you follow up with additional, well-publicized and widely accessible opportunities for Kansans to participate in your information-gathering effort after the Census data are available and prior to the start of the 2022 session. Such opportunities, especially if publicized at least two weeks in advance, will enable you to learn specifically what your constituents identify as their communities of interest and fair representative districts. The committees will save much time and expense if those opportunities encourage submission of virtual testimony.

League members and other residents of this area have identified commonalities of interest that will inform your redistricting deliberations. Providing opportunities for communities to describe their areas will also improve the fairness of the process.

Johnson and Wyandotte counties are one such community of interest. Our organization, like many other organizations and businesses, serves residents of both counties. We actively register voters in both counties and host educational forums on policy issues that concern voters in the region.

What happens in one county greatly affects the other in myriad ways—economic viability, infrastructure durability, environmental impacts, to name just a few. As population centers within the larger Kansas City metro area, we have distinct, shared interests that should be taken into account when drawing electoral maps. The Kansas City Metro is currently whole within Kansas' Third Congressional District and should remain in a single district.

Please provide opportunities for more communities to provide you with similar information. Kansas deserves fair maps, and every Kansan's vote should matter equally.

Thank you for your time and attention this evening.

Amber Stenger  
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