

Testimony from
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Kansas City Redistricting Town Hall
August 12, 2021

Chairmen and Members of the Special Committee on Redistricting:

My name is Mike Kane, President of Tri-County Labor Council and I appreciate the opportunity today to present public comments on behalf of the several thousand members of the Tri-County Labor Council.

Our members believe that the Congressional and Legislative Redistricting and Reapportionment process is an essential foundation of our democracy and that is why I submit this testimony before your committee. Our members feel that for our democracy to endure, that voters should be allowed to choose their elected officials, elected officials should not be allowed to choose their voters. A fair and open redistricting process that listens to, and takes into full account the views and interests of all our citizens is key to upholding Kansas values during this important endeavor. Your being here today at this public hearing is a testament to your willingness to take public testimony for the record. We hope you also take what you hear today to heart and into full consideration as the redistricting process moves forward.

Although complete data from the US Census Bureau is not fully available, and that may alter what is feasible and possible to achieve as the redistricting process evolves further, there are some main redistricting principles that we respectfully ask the committee to fully consider as Congressional and Legislative maps are drawn for the next decade.

First, we know that Kansas will be able to maintain four congressional districts. Based on the level of Census data that is available, we believe that Kansas congressional districts should remain close to their current configurations. In reality, only minimal changes are needed to the congressional map, and any major shifts would be a clear indication of blatant partisan gerrymandering, and a sign that politicians are solely interested in choosing their own voters.

Second, the Kansas redistricting process should adhere to the common redistricting principal of preserving the core of existing districts. For example, Kansas City is currently whole within the Third Congressional District. It is a clear community of interest. Our members believe it should remain whole in a single congressional district.

Third, the Kansas redistricting process should strive to keep districts as compact as possible. Again, with the Third District as an example, with the population growth in the Kansas City metro region, the Third Congressional district can be contained wholly within Johnson and Wyandotte County.

It is important to note that throughout the modern redistricting era (which is commonly recognized in history as since the 1970's), Kansas City (Wyandotte County) and Johnson County have been in the same congressional district. Splitting them apart would be a blatant attempt to manipulate the maps and gerrymander the Third District.

Fourth, protecting communities of interest, (those neighborhoods, towns, regions that share common priorities and experiences), is another important principle the Kansas redistricting process must commit to and follow.

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Using again the Third Congressional District as an example, many communities of interest found within the district have historically been pushed out of the process. Keeping communities of interest together are important for those communities, and the working families that reside in them, to thrive and succeed. Furthermore, any major changes in the current makeup of the Kansas congressional districts will have the largest negative impact on minority communities that are already struggling for representation. Gerrymandering the Kansas City metro region into the more rural parts of the state does not respect the different priorities and needs of urban, suburban, and rural communities in the state.

Finally, I would respectfully ask that as the Kansas Redistricting process moves towards drawing and releasing congressional and legislative maps, that legislators ensure that the public will have a full and complete opportunity to review and provide further input on those proposals before any final decisions are made. A fair, open and transparent process that fully considers the basic principles I have referenced in my testimony today and considers the full range of public input, is critically important for the next ten years and beyond.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony today.