

Written Testimony from: Connie Brown Collins (Cornelia Collins)
Organizational Affiliation: Concerned Voters of Wyandotte County
Date: August 12, 2021
Hearing Location: KCK Community College, Kansas City, KS
Contact Information: conniejbrown53@gmail.com; 913-334-4845
This testimony is: written and spoken

Mr. Chair, members of the Redistricting Committee:

My name is Connie Brown Collins, organizer of Concerned Voters of Wyandotte County. My community is Kansas City, KS in Wyandotte County, an integral part of the greater Kansas City Metropolitan area.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony for our community of interest on this crucial redistricting process for the state of Kansas. I am requesting that District 3 remain whole including both Wyandotte and Johnson Counties.

I convened several meetings with the League of Women Voters of Johnson and Wyandotte Counties that comprised fellow community members of both counties. The meetings were held on 7/30, 8/3, 8/5 and 8/7 and represented the following community organizations: JOCO NAACP, Cross Border Network, Concerned Voters of Wyandotte County, Women's Equality Coalition, Women's Intercultural Network, Justice and Equity Coalition, Advocates for Immigrant Rights and Reconciliation, Grandview Presbyterian Church, Civic Action Ministry of Oakridge Missionary Baptist Church, and All Souls UU KC Justice Action Group. Employees of El Centro and members of the WYCO NAACP also participated. We met to discuss how our communities are comparable and how they are distinct.

As proud "Dottes" residing in our county, we view our diversity as our most important community asset. Racially/Ethnically, we are 43% white, 27% Latino/Latinix and 25% Black/African American, with approx. 5% other nationalities and ethnicities. Our county is one of two in the nation that has no majority ethnic group. We think of our community as an urban center, home to important sources of community involvement, businesses and services, including top notch health/medical care and research, manufacturing, employment, transportation, immigrant services, educational institutions, retail, sports and entertainment.

In comparison, Wyandotte and Johnson Counties are by far the most densely populated in the state. The counties are contiguous, compact, geographically similar, and share many commonalities. They are linked by population, healthcare, transportation, employment, history, weather and environment, education, media, and other key mutual interests and concerns.

Though I live in Wyandotte County, I constantly travel for daily activities across the two-county area. I do my main grocery and other shopping at supermarkets and retailers in Johnson and Wyandotte. My bank and pharmacy are in Johnson. My main health and medical facilities and appointments are in Wyandotte and Johnson. My family has utilized hospitals, rehabilitation facilities, assisted living and nursing facilities in Johnson and Wyandotte. I currently travel the I-70/ 635/35/435 corridors several times a week on appointments, errands and other business and leisure ventures and activities.

Additional shared priorities include:

Communities – As a member of the Wellborn KCK community, I share with my Johnson County neighbors a desire for clean, well-maintained neighborhoods, accessible healthcare, well-maintained roads, highways and infrastructure, educational opportunities, business opportunities, clean environment and responsible business development. Access to parks, playgrounds, sports and leisure activities for families and children are equally important.

Population – Our residents are our greatest asset as shown by our combined population concentration which is the densest in Kansas. We share three of the five largest cities in the state, Overland Park, Kansas

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City and Olathe. Also, Wyandotte and Johnson are the most densely populated counties statewide, with a 2019 study estimating Wyandotte's density to be 1,091 persons per square mile and Johnson's at 1,272 persons per square mile. These counties dwarf the next most populous county, Sedgwick, which is estimated at 517 people per square mile.

Healthcare Systems – We share an extensive network of health care services including major medical centers/hospitals, clinics and research facilities. These facilities both coordinate and cooperate across the metro area with KCK-based KU Medical Center and complex as a major community asset and regional leader. Healthcare needs and issues addressed at the federal level include research funding, uninsured healthcare, Medicare and Medicaid funding, and rules, funding, guidance and response during healthcare emergencies like the Corona Virus pandemic.

Transportation Systems – We share an expansive transportation system that spans multiple counties and includes freeway systems, highways, interstates, rail systems, and airports which not only serve local communities, but regional, statewide and national needs. A major concern locally, however is traffic and freeway crowding and conditions which impact and impair residents during daily activities such as travel to and from work, schools and health care appointments, as well as necessity shopping. Improvements to highways and travel corridors is mostly dependent on federal and state funding.

Employment and Employment Mobility – Both counties provide major employment opportunities for the region with large employers, service providers, suppliers, educational institutions and manufacturers, such as Wyandotte's University of Kansas Hospital, Kansas City Kansas Public Schools, University of Kansas Medical Center, General Motors Fairfax Assembly Plant, Unified Government and Amazon (Wyandotte Economic Development Council 2021). Likewise, Johnson's largest employers include T-Mobile, Shawnee Mission School District, Blue Valley School District, Black & Veach, Overland Park Regional Medical Center and Johnson County Community College (OP Chamber 2019). Residents of both counties depend on jobs across county lines, which is common to this area as opposed to elsewhere in the state and promotes economic connectivity and social interactions. Commuting long distances in heavy traffic is also usual and a complaint of residents (including myself).

Environment – We share unique environmental concerns due to the population density in this area. Contributing factors are air quality issues due to increased traffic flow and from neighborhoods downwind of industry (such as railroads) and agricultural practices that contribute to smoke and air particulates. There are also water quality, water run-off and flooding issues due to low-lying land mass in some areas and in others, commercial buildings and hard surfaces.

Education – There are a number of satellite campuses of Kansas post-secondary education institutions across the Metro area. In addition, there are two key public community colleges and numerous private and post-secondary institutions that serve more students who are considered "non-traditional" than in other areas of the state. These students may vary based on age (myself, included; I have attended both KCK Community College and Johnson County Community College), and family, work and socioeconomic status. These students often have a greater need for federal financial assistance.

In the final analysis, Wyandotte and Johnson Counties should continue in the Third Congressional District due to their shared community of interest, outlined above, and urban and regional overlap which include population, critical services, healthcare, employment, infrastructure, environmental and educational demographics and concerns. Thank you for your time and attention.