

JO Health Research, LLC

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August 13, 2021

Lawrence Town Hall (1111 Capitol Federal Hall, University of Kansas)

Written-Only Testimony

Rep. Chris Croft
House Committee on Redistricting

Sen. Rick Wilborn
Senate Committee on Redistricting

RE: State of Kansas Redistricting Following 2020 Census

Dear Chairs Croft and Wilborn, Members of the Committees, and other state and local policymakers:

As public health researchers and practitioners have concluded—even prior to the recent pandemic—**where you live matters for your health**. Data obtained through validated processes for our communities show that both health outcomes and the health factors contributing to those outcomes vary by geopolitical jurisdiction, with disparities visible at county boundaries (see attached) but also at district boundaries. This is a key factor when considering something as critical as creating dividing lines for congressional and state legislative representation. Where you live matters for your health, and it is incumbent upon the Kansas Legislature to ensure that citizens are not denied or abridged of their right to representation which advocates for their health and well-being.

I urge the committees to consider formation of an independent commission to investigate and recommend revisions to the current Kansas geopolitical districts. Leadership within the Kansas Legislature have suggested ways in which the political process may be subverted to disadvantage the political opposition, which may be an indication that a partisan process is likely to be flawed. In the United States, ten (10) states utilize independent commissions for congressional redistricting and fifteen (15) states use independent commissions for state legislative commissions. These include peer states such as Colorado and Arizona which benefit from non-politician, independent redistricting commissions.

I further urge the committees to provide additional opportunities for public feedback that are well-publicized and scheduled with ample time for stakeholders and subject-matter experts to prepare informed testimony to the committee. Most town hall sessions were absent the detailed 2020 Census data, due, in part, to delays on behalf of the federal government. The short notice for the town halls, small number of sessions (scheduled during working hours), and convening prior availability of district-level data may have each hindered adequate preparation of testimony and impeded informed debate—including by members of the committees—on composition of fair districts. The survey data for which we each contributed is now available to us and appropriate time must be taken to examine those findings to discover the geographic distribution of different communities of interest.

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Each of these requests could be easily accomplished by the Legislature, as stewards of the process, with minimal costs. These steps may prevent future costs to taxpayers associated with lengthy litigation and may also ensure that redistricting remains a Kansas process and not one that is remanded to the federal judiciary. We rely upon each of you to protect and preserve the rights of all Kansans to access social, cultural, racial, and economic representation that arises from a fair apportionment process.

Thank you for hosting this community forum and for reviewing my testimony in earnest. If you may have any questions on my submitted testimony, please contact me by e-mail at johealthresearch@gmail.com or phone at +1 (785)341-0192.

Sincerely,

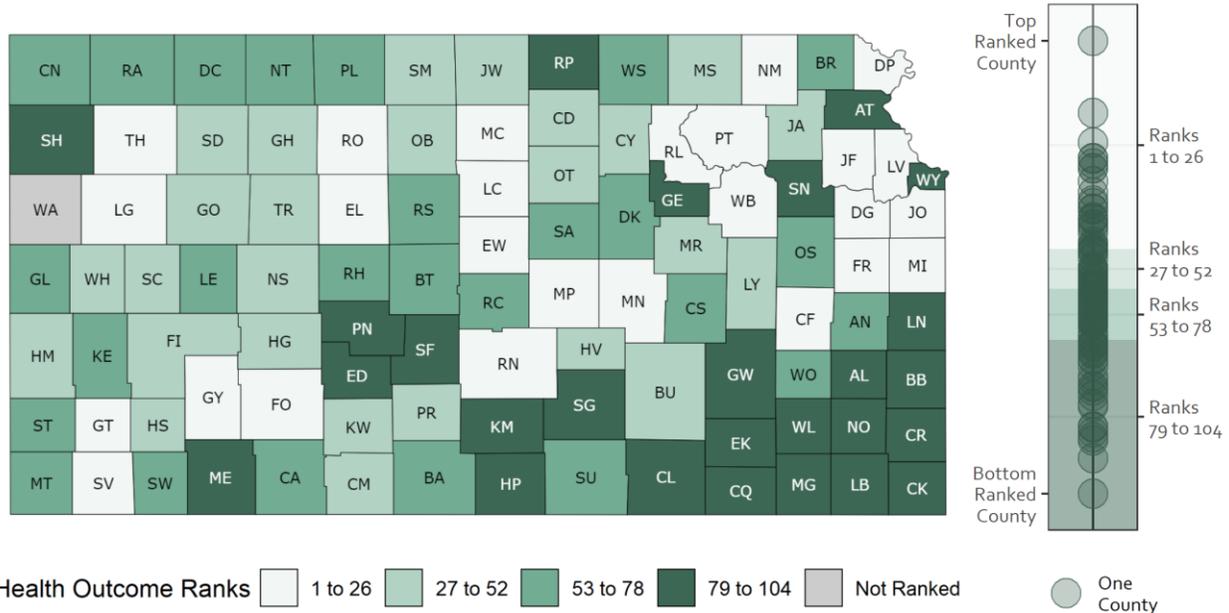


Jason M. Orr, MPH

Electronic Transmittal:
Kansas Legislative Research Department (redistricting@klrd.ks.gov)

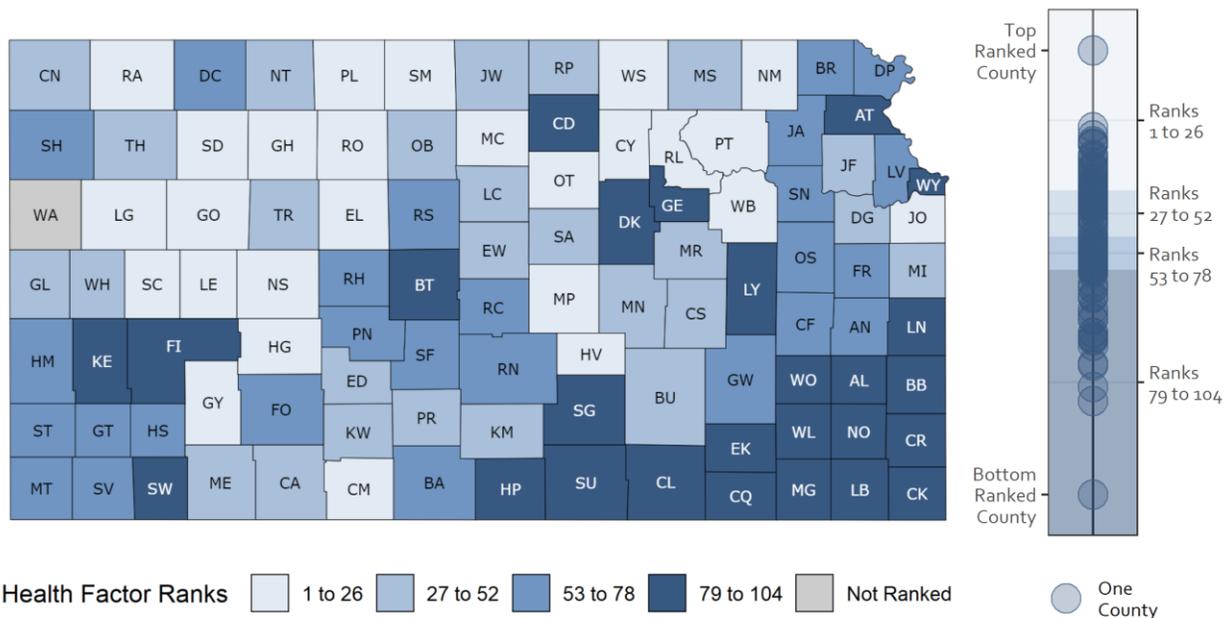
Enclosures
2020 County Health Rankings – Health Outcome and Health Factor Rankings for Kansas

Figure 1. Health Outcome ranks displayed using quartiles (map) and underlying health outcome scores (chart)



Source: University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute. (2021). *County Health Rankings State Report 2020: Kansas*. <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/reports/state-reports/2020-kansas-report>

Figure 2. Health Factor ranks displayed using quartiles (map) and underlying health factor scores (chart)



Source: University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute. (2021). *County Health Rankings State Report 2020: Kansas*. <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/reports/state-reports/2020-kansas-report>.