

Oral with Written Testimony for Thursday, August 12, 2021 in Overland Park

From: Leslie Mark

To: The Joint House and Senate Committees on Redistricting
Re: Fair & Equitable Representation in Kansas

Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to supply testimony in support of transparent and fair redistricting.

I am asking you assume a broad perspective to consider how it is we propose to commit to one another — in this community and across this state — to ensure that America's democracy encompasses all of her people?

As we do every ten years after enumerating, we are called today to begin mapping our communities so that we might responsibly govern ourselves. Statewide public hearings are vital to the process of redistricting, especially to ensure fairness and transparency. I am concerned, however, that we have not centered commitment to one another in this hasty process.

(1) This week's hearings were scheduled before Census2020 data have been released which makes specific, meaningful contributions to composition of districts impossible. Hearings were also jammed into five days, all over Kansas, with insufficient time allotted at each session for thoughtful presentation or maximal community participation.

(2) Current maps were created by the courts and should, wherever possible, be minimally altered as you respond to inevitable reapportionment shifts. Unquestionably, how we choose to respond to those shifts affects every aspect of our communal life, from the economy to healthcare to public education. We must not return to manipulated maps for politically personal / party gain or to elect someone who doesn't accurately reflect those living within the new boundaries.

(3) Complex and timely issues (affordable housing, urban infrastructure, or gun violence, for example) demand responsive and participatory representation. Purposefully breaking up community takes away it's ability to come together or advocate for important issues. Thus, cleaving Wyandotte and Johnson counties (as [then] Senate President Susan Wagle vowed to do) clearly delivers representation for special interests and politicians but not for us, the people.

(4) Kansas' current supermajority leadership have taken to making many final legislative decisions behind closed doors. For redistricting to be accepted and trusted by all Kansans, you

must ensure transparency in the final map proposal process; any demonstrable flaws must be allowed to be corrected before the Legislature takes a final vote.

On the eve of the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 terror attacks I am inspired by one young victim — an avid diarist — who wrestled with many ideas about life's purpose while working through his grief after the loss of a friend. He wrote just days before his own untimely death, "Our commitments to one another are what we are here for — and that, in itself, is life. Even when the commitments are hard. Even when they cause us pain. That is life."

What has 9/11 to do with redistricting? The young man's statement on commitment implies a question: Why are we here and what purpose is there in our being? While he was talking about personal commitments, his words also confront the challenge of American democracy: how do we commit to one another so that every citizen has the opportunity to live their best life? Clearly we are called to lay a foundation that can support us all — starting with fair maps.

Respectfully,

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