

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

From: Stacey Knoell

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.

Hello, my name is Stacey Knoell and I live in Olathe with my husband and two daughters. As of the past 5 years or so, I have begun to pay close attention to how our government and systems work. I have to say, it is equal parts fascinating and frustrating and that brings me to redistricting.

We all know that drawing legislative districts is a political process. Indeed, the Supreme Court has given political gerrymandering the green light. With that backdrop, it is no surprise that former Kansas Senate President, Susan Wagle, felt emboldened enough to speak openly about the plan to draw Sharice Davids out of a congressional district. It is more interesting that she could speak with such authority about what any district would look like without seeing any Census data. It is almost as if there was a plan to cheat.

Unfortunately, drawing a district that Sharice cannot win relies heavily on taking an Exacto knife to the KC metro area. Any plan to draw Wyandotte County into, say, the Big First congressional district would have a chilling effect on the African American voting bloc in Wyandotte county. The United States is a representative Democracy and for that to work, it needs to be possible for people to elect people who actually represent them and their interests. I would argue that placing WYCO in a congressional district with, say, Greely, Wallace, or Seward Counties would do both communities a disservice, but do particular harm to Wyandotte County.

Since partisan gerrymandering is legal, I hope you would take into consideration the optics of future maps. Politics is nothing if not concerned with optics and a map drawn with the specific goal of disenfranchising an entire county's worth of voters is bad for us all. Such maps undermine faith in the system because it leaves an entire community with the strong impression that they are political pawns, expendable ones at that, and wondering if any representative elected in this gerrymandered district would have any of their concerns at the forefront. Moreover, those of us living in Johnson County would know that a map breaking off Wyandotte County would have no other purpose than to break apart the Democratic voting base that Northeast Kansas has become and, of course, meet the stated goal of drawing Sharice Davids out of a winnable district.

I am here to request that this committee draw fair maps that do not seek to undermine voters. The burden of proof is on you and the bar has been set high as previous Senate Presidents have so openly spoken of plans to remove fairness from the equation by adding in trickery.

I thank you for your time today and will be watching how this process unfolds with great interest.

Respectfully,

Stacey Knoell

12501 S. Arapaho Drive
Olathe, Kansas 66062
816-668-9190
sbknoell@gmail.com