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To the members of the Kansas Redistricting Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to submit testimony as a Kansan who is interested in preserving our democracy in the upcoming redistricting process.

While you may fulfill the absolute bare minimum of consulting with the people of Kansas about new district lines, we all know these hearings are a farce.

Last time around, the committee heard testimony over a period of months, with the full Census data needed to draw new districts fully available to all.

In 2021, the committee is holding all hearings in a single week, all of them during the work week, and with most of them at times that make it very nearly impossible for working people to attend. Personally, I had to use a couple hours of paid time off in order to be present for this hearing. Not only that, but hearings are being held the week before the actual data needed to draw the maps is released.

That's why these hearings are an absolute farce.

If you had simply waited to begin these hearings, we would have the proper Census data needed for real citizen input on new maps. If you had simply followed past precedent and spaced the hearings out over a period of 4 months, we would be able to provide real input on the maps Kansans want to see.

But this committee chose to do exactly none of that, and we all know why. The majority party intends to create maps that put their interests ahead of the interests of Kansans who want to make their voices heard in our democracy. Simply put: gerrymandering is cheating.

Drawing maps that crush the voices of Kansans who may now be a minority, but who will not be a minority forever, is antithetical to democracy itself. It is a betrayal of everything this country is supposed to be.

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And yes, under public pressure, Speaker Ryckman and Senator Willborn have reportedly agreed to hold additional hearings at a future date. Apparently they have realized that not at least giving the appearance of listening may damage their case when this inevitably makes its way to the courts. None of us are fools. We understand that this is desperate attempt to give this process a veneer of legitimacy after the public reacted so negatively to being ignored.

So since the Committee is focused on ignoring Kansans, I would like to put this in the record for the Kansas Supreme Court: don't fall for it. Don't let the Legislature which has consistently undermined the judiciary undermine democracy itself, too.

To the Kansas Supreme Court, I beg you: don't let them take our democracy away. Please. Kansans need our Supreme Court to stand up for our democratic system of government, now more than ever.

Without fair maps, we have no real democracy. Without fair maps, we destroy the idea of the consent of the governed. Without fair maps, we have no real say in our own government. That's dangerous for any democracy, but is especially so in our present combustible times.

The stakes have never been higher because as we have seen in states like Wisconsin & North Carolina, once a gerrymander is in place, it can be nearly impossible to dismantle. This is even more true in a state like Kansas, which does not allow the citizen ballot initiatives that have (or will) dismantle gerrymanders in states like Michigan.

It is not hard to imagine a scenario in which the current majority party creates for itself an impregnable two-thirds majority in both houses of the Legislature, and uses that supermajority to again create gerrymandered maps in 2031 and 2041 and so on, regardless of how Kansans vote.

The difference is that in 2031 or 2041, we may not have a Kansas Supreme Court willing to take a stand for the rights of the minority. You must take a stand now, Justices. The fate of our noble experiment in democracy lies in your hands alone.

You must protect our state, and you must protect all Kansans. Even future generations of Kansans are counting on you.

The people of Kansas have faith in our courts as disinterested & fair adjudicators. Do not underestimate the public's faith in, and esteem for, our judiciary. We trust the courts to draw fair lines far more than we do the politicians who want to use redistricting to give themselves their ideal seats. The courts have no dog in this fight, but the politicians do.

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So to the Kansas Supreme Court, I beg you: be brave. Use the power vested in you by our Constitution to uphold democracy itself, for we may not get another chance at it.

To the legislators who are holding this hearing today, I say: shame on you. Shame on all of you for caring more about preserving your power than listening to the people you are supposed to represent.

I hope the Kansas Supreme Court does to the Legislature exactly what it has done to the people of Kansas: ignores everything you say, every argument you make, and shuts down your every attempt to influence the process of map-making.

You've shown Kansans how little you think of us, Redistricting Committee. You've shown Kansans what your intentions are.

Since none of you apparently have an ounce of shame about that, and certainly not enough shame to make a single public objection to this farce of a process, I must beg the Kansas Supreme Court to safeguard our democracy and summarily reject any and all maps that might emerge from this sham of a process.

If this process was fair, it would also be easy. In terms of the 4 congressional districts, the Fourth District would remain centered on Wichita, and the Third District would comprise the core of the Kansas City metro area: Wyandotte & Johnson County, minus whatever fragment of JoCo is needed to balance populations. The Second District should include Lawrence and Topeka as its core, with the rural First District taking basically everything else. I would have drawn you some maps to show you what I mean, but as I stated previously, you've made that impossible.

I would normally close by thanking the committee for its time and for allowing me to submit testimony, but given how little regard you have shown for my time and my testimony, I will just pray that God has mercy on your souls.

Very Sincerely,
Matthew Calcara

Affiliations:

- Elected Democratic Party Precinct Committeeman, Olathe 4-14
- Chair, KS LGBTQ+ Leadership PAC