

Written-only Testimony for Thursday, August 12, 2021 in Overland Park

From: Gail James

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 have lived in both Wyandotte and Johnson Counties over 40 years, relocating from one to another according to employment and association with diverse communities. I am requesting 1) that the hearing process be thorough and comprehensive, allowing for time and participation, as it has been in prior years; the present brief model is insufficient and incomplete. 2) that Wyandotte and Johnson Counties be left intact, and that boundaries not be shifted for political or racial reasons or motivation.

My understanding of redistricting is based on the Court's decision 10 years ago to retain Wyandotte and Johnson Counties unified in the 3rd Congressional District. At this time, ten years later, there is no compelling reason to alter the map, given the fact that Census Data is yet to be known. Moreover, the decades-long reality of both counties gives testimony to shared urban and suburban neighborhoods, employment opportunities of light industry and small business, the institutional connectedness of colleges and universities, as well as health systems. Most importantly, the diverse populations of the counties should be counted as a strength of the area, allowing for the empowerment of all. Shifting of boundaries will serve as a disenfranchisement and dilution of the voice of people in the area, and will lead to significant disruption in voting power and candidate selection. This is not acceptable in 2021, where the key source of diversity in the state should be encouraged to retain its identity and multiplicity of voices and perspectives. This is my experience, living and working in both counties, that the 3rd District is a clear and present asset and strength in the state, and must be maintained unified and intact.

Without detailed 2020 Census data, I cannot make suggestions about the composition of fair districts at this time. No one, including yourselves, has had an opportunity to see detailed Census results and identify what changes are required to maintain equality of population in our districts. I urge the committee to hold additional town halls after census data is available and Kansans can review that data and offer input. I would encourage that those meetings be accessible, available online, and announced with enough time to foster engagement.

Current Congressional and Legislative maps were created by the courts and should, as possible, be altered as little as necessary to fulfill reapportionment shifts. The Kansas City Metro is currently whole within Kansas' Third congressional district and should remain in a single district as residents have shared interests in representation.

I am asking for continuation of the hearing process, to allow for study of new Census data, and for engagement of the public in the discussion about its implications. Also, I submit that Wyandotte and Johnson Counties offer a clear and unified entity which offer a significant voice in Kansas reality, and should be maintained intact.

Respectfully,

Gail James

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