

Stacey Knoell, Executive Director of the Kansas African American Affairs Commission. Thursday, August 12, Kansas City, Kansas Community College, 7:30pm

My name is Stacey Knoell and I am here today wearing my professional hat as the Executive Director of the Kansas African American Affairs Commission. As such, I would like to address the potential impact that new district lines will have on the voting rights and habits of the African American community in Kansas, specifically in Wyandotte County.

To that end, I am here to present the KC Metro area as a community of interest. A quick Google search of the phrase, "KC Metro" will produce maps that include Wyandotte and Johnson Counties as the Kansas contribution to the area. We share geographic similarities and cultural and economic ties. There are fluid transitions and close associations across the county line. For example, my mother recently moved to Olathe from KCK, however, her church and doctor are still in Wyandotte County. Similarly, my family has enjoyed shopping at Village Point or taking in a Sporting or Monarch's game. There is a shared mindset within the two counties – that being that we are a metropolitan community with a focus on a "city" or "suburban" lifestyle. We are not rural in composition or worldview. Indeed, even people in JOCO who live on the outskirts stay in this county because they are not ready to make the move to actual "rural" living.

In recent decades, Johnson and Wyandotte counties have been included in CD3 as a voting block because of the shared economic interest. From business investments to infrastructure issues to water management, Wyandotte and Johnson have more in common than Wyandotte and the southwest corner of Kansas or Johnson and the southeast corner of Kansas. It makes sense geographically, culturally, and economically to keep Wyandotte and Johnson Counties together as a voting bloc in the upcoming redistricting efforts.

Lastly, I would like to express my disappointment with how these hearings have been conducted. As the Executive Director of the Kansas African American Affairs Commission, I am aware that certain requests for transparency and accommodation have been made, but not met or addressed. I know because I wrote the letters from the external commissions. I appreciate that there are 14 hearings across the state. However, I cannot stress enough the disappointment of having all 14 hearings crammed into one calendar week, each hearing only 75 min in length, with no rules of engagement so that the public could adequately prepare testimony. For example, I did not know until I arrived at this meeting how long I would be allowed to present my verbal testimony. There is a big difference between 30 seconds and 3 minutes and that type of uncertainty does not invite the public to take a risk to become engaged in this process.

We asked that there would be meetings in the evening and on weekends to accommodate working schedules. Even I had a quick conversation with the Governor's Deputy Chief of Staff to make sure it was OK for me to show up to this meeting, in the middle of the day, to testify before this commission, without having to use vacation time. Mr. Wright said yes, but what about other people who could not get the time off work to attend this meeting in the middle of the day?

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There has been great confusion surrounding accessibility issues from the presence of sign language or Spanish language interpreters to whether the proceedings will be recorded and publicly available. We are aware that Representative Rykman has announced another round of hearings for the fall and would once again like to request transparency around that process but also clarity so that members of the public can have their voices heard. A process as important as redistricting should have as much public input as possible. We live in a Representative Democracy where people should have the right to elect representation that reflects them and their concerns. But we are also in a country where partisan gerrymandering is legal. The least you can do is open up the process, so we know what and who we are voting for.

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