

Testimony to the Kansas House Redistricting Committee

Wednesday, March 7, 2012

Rm. 346S, Topeka Capitol

My name is Mark Wiebe. I am submitting this testimony as a Johnson County resident on the proposed redistricting of the Federal Congressional District that currently serves my county. I have lived in Johnson County for almost all of my life. I have worked in Wyandotte County for the last 17 years.

Please note that I am strongly opposed to any redistricting that would separate Johnson and Wyandotte counties. Both counties share numerous common interests; as such, both are well-served by having the same Congressional representative. Both, in other words, are communities of “like interest.” They belong to the same metropolitan region, the greater Kansas City area; they share economic interests that mutually benefit the other; they have thousands of residents who everyday cross the county line to work in the other county.

Indeed, the boundary that separates the two counties grows fainter with every year that passes. Consider the Interstate 435 corridor in the western part of both counties. In the last decade, that corridor has grown with the advent of Village West and Kansas Speedway in Wyandotte County and the steady growth of commercial businesses in western Johnson County. We expect to see similar growth, and already see a similar blurring of boundaries, along the K-7 highway corridor.

These two corridors are just two examples of the common interests that Johnson and Wyandotte counties share. Their growth, in other words, is intimately connected. It is difficult to fathom why anyone would want to sever these communities and place Wyandotte into a district that would include large rural communities whose interests have little or nothing to do with the interests of urban and suburban growth.

But urban and suburban growth isn't the only thing that binds these two communities. Poverty does, too. As difficult as it may be to believe, Johnson County now has more residents living in poverty than Wyandotte County. Issues related to poverty that once seemed to belong exclusively to Wyandotte—blighted housing, poor health outcomes, crime—are now finding a home in some Johnson County neighborhoods. As the two communities struggle to find answers to these problems, they find themselves connected in ways that seemed difficult to imagine just a few years ago.

I urge this committee to give careful consideration to issues like these as it goes about the difficult task of reshaping the state's Congressional districts. And I thank you for that consideration.

Sincerely,

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