

Andrew Green

Testimony in Opposition to House Bill 479

November 10, 2021

Thank you, chair Wilkin, vice-chair White, ranking member Brown, and members of the House Government Oversight Committee for allowing me the opportunity to submit written testimony regarding House Bill 479. Unfortunately, my presence to testify in person is not possible due to the poor scheduling of this hearing during the workday.

On May 8, 2018, over 74 percent of Ohio voters, including over 50 percent of voters in EVERY one of Ohio's 88 counties, voted to approve Issue 1, a constitutional amendment that was hailed as a reform to prevent gerrymandering during the congressional redistricting process. To be clear, gerrymandering is defined, by Merriam-Webster, as "the practice of dividing or arranging a territorial unit into election districts in a way that gives one political party an unfair advantage in elections." The text of Issue 1, as it appeared on the May 8, 2018 ballot read:

Issue 1

Creates a bipartisan, public process for drawing congressional districts

Proposed Constitutional Amendment

Proposed by Joint Resolution of the General Assembly

To amend the version of Section 1 of Article XI that is scheduled to take effect January 1, 2021, and to enact Sections 1, 2, and 3 of Article XIX of the Constitution of the State of Ohio to establish a process for congressional redistricting.

A majority yes vote is necessary for the amendment to pass.

The proposed amendment would:

- End the partisan process for drawing congressional districts, and replace it with a process with the goals of promoting bipartisanship, keeping local communities together, and having district boundaries that are more compact.*
- Ensure a transparent process by requiring public hearings and allowing public submission of proposed plans.*
- Require the General Assembly or the Ohio Redistricting Commission to adopt new congressional districts by a bipartisan vote for the plan to be effective for the full 10-year period.*
- Require that if a plan is adopted by the General Assembly without significant bipartisan support, it cannot be effective for the entire 10-year period and must comply with explicit anti-gerrymandering requirements. If passed, the amendment will become effective immediately.*

While the above description of the approved constitutional amendment is not the exact language of the law, it is what the Ohio voters read prior to voting to approve Issue 1. The spirit of this description should be followed in any good faith redistricting efforts in Ohio, as it is the text that Ohio

voters overwhelmingly agreed to. However, proposed congressional districts were drawn separately by each of the two major political parties (i.e. NOT bipartisan). Additionally, proposed districts were drawn behind closed doors, with one party only releasing its proposal at the last possible minute—just moments before sponsor hearings on the bills—in formats that made it nearly impossible for the average Ohioan to conduct a thorough analysis (i.e. NOT public and NOT transparent). I would know. While I relied on others to make sense of the U.S. Census Block assignments in House Bill 479, I converted the block assignment PDF file pertaining to Senate Bill 258 myself. It took nearly three hours of copying and pasting over 100,000 15-digit U.S. Census Block numbers multiple times over and assigning each of them to the appropriate district number. This is well beyond the technical knowledge of most Ohioans and more time consuming than most Ohioans have to dedicate to the matter *even if* they had the technical knowledge to do it. Through this process though, I did find several U.S. Census Blocks that were unassigned in Senate Bill 258, so that may be something the sponsor of the bill may want to look into if it is to be considered a legitimate congressional district proposal.

Before addressing the egregious proposal contained in House Bill 479, I would like to address one final issue I have with the redistricting process as a whole. There have been five committee hearings held regarding redistricting so far between the two chambers of the Ohio General Assembly. As of the time I am writing this testimony, there is one more committee hearing in each of the two chambers as well as two joint committee hearings scheduled for this week. Of these nine hearings, all of them are scheduled in Columbus, during the work week, during the work day. If this were not the case, many more Ohioans (myself included) would be able to attend. I have a flexible schedule and, despite living two hours from the statehouse, can be at the statehouse within a few minutes after the end of my work day if necessary. However, zero of nine committee hearings have been scheduled outside of the workday. Other Ohioans are not as lucky as I. Hearings should be held in different areas across the state, with some occurring in the evening and on the weekends in order to make hearings accessible to all Ohioans, regardless of their schedules.

Now, I would like to address my concerns with the proposed House Bill 479. I will briefly comment on the splitting of the city of Cincinnati from its immediate suburbs, the splitting of the city of Toledo, and the splitting of portions of Franklin county to include them in districts that sprawl away from the nearby urban and suburban areas in and immediately surrounding Columbus all the way northwest to Allen county and southeast past Lancaster. While I am from none of these areas of the state, knowing how nearby communities outside large cities tend to come together and intermingle in and around the city in their daily lives tells me that it is a disservice to all communities involved to split them apart as it is done in House Bill 479.

I have spent the vast majority of my life living in Northeast Ohio. I grew up just outside the city of Youngstown, in Austintown, spent five years living in and around Cleveland while in college, and recently moved to Cuyahoga Falls, just outside the city of Akron, so I consider myself to be pretty well acquainted with Northeast Ohio. In my personal opinion, some of the worst districts under House Bill 479 are drawn, at least partially, in Northeast Ohio. I live in Summit County. Under House Bill 479, I would live in Congressional District 13. As a resident of Cuyahoga Falls, I often find myself going to other places such as Akron, Green, Canton, Fairlawn, Stow, Peninsula, and Kent to work, shop, and spend my leisure time. Under this proposal, those communities are spread across three separate congressional districts. Even if I restrict the named communities to those within Summit county, they are still spread across three separate districts. Under House Bill 479, the city of Akron is split almost exactly in half,

almost directly down Exchange Street. Not only does this split the city as a whole, but it also splits a smaller, even tighter-knit community within the city: The University of Akron. The legislative committees taking on congressional redistricting and the Ohio Redistricting Commission have heard about the splitting of college and university campuses from members of those campus communities that they may affect, which is a topic of great concern among many campus communities across the state. However, instead of maintaining the very clearly defined communities that are UA and the city of Akron, House Bill 479 chooses to pair portions of each with Jefferson in Ashtabula County or Logan in Hocking County. I don't know much about Hocking County, but from what little I do know, the residents have greatly different concerns from those in the city of Akron and the immediately surrounding communities. I do know a little bit about Jefferson, though. My grandparents lived there when I was young. It is a perfectly nice village with many great people, some of whom I've had the pleasure of meeting. However, the concerns of those people do not closely align with those of the urban and suburban residents in and around Akron. It is a disservice to both communities to pair them together unnecessarily. The third district that meanders its way into Summit County takes in much of the western portion of the county, including Peninsula, Boston Heights, and Boston Township, the heart of Cuyahoga Valley National Park. I am a frequent park-goer. The Ohio and Erie Canal Towpath provides a superb running surface, something that I did competitively for nearly ten years and have since continued to do for fun. However, instead of pairing Peninsula, Boston Heights, and Boston Township with frequent park patrons in communities like Twinsburg, Stow, Cuyahoga Falls, Fairlawn, and Hudson, it pairs the park with Ashtabula and Conneaut, just a few miles from the aforementioned village of Jefferson, which is not in the same district. The fact that Summit county and Ashtabula county share not one but two congressional districts is quite puzzling. Neither county exceeds the congressional ratio of representation, so theoretically, both counties could be entirely contained within a single district. The two counties do not border each other nor do they both border any single other county, yet, somehow, they share two congressional districts. Additionally, Article XIX, Section 2(B)(7) of the Ohio Constitution prohibits any two counties from sharing more than one congressional district with the exception of counties that have a population in excess of 400,000. Since Summit county's population is over 400,000, this is technically permissible. However, simply because it is allowed does not mean it should be done. Furthermore, the fact that Section 2(B)(7) even exists strongly suggests that this situation should be avoided in all instances, regardless of a county's population, if at all possible. Additionally, it stands to reason that counties in the corners of the state should be the least likely counties to be split simply because there are only two Cartesian directions to span out from rather than the four for any other county. Given the fact that Ohio doesn't have much of a "corner" in the southeast, that leaves just three corners, corresponding to three "corner counties:" Hamilton, Ashtabula, and Williams. Hamilton county is over the congressional ratio of representation, so it must be split. That leaves two relatively small counties that should be relatively difficult to split: Ashtabula and Williams. However, House Bill 479 manages to find a way to carve up Ashtabula county such that it shares both of its congressional districts with Summit county.

Now, I would like to discuss the handling of my hometown of Austintown and surrounding communities under House Bill 479. Mahoning county pairs well with its neighboring counties in the Mahoning and Shenango Valleys, known locally simply as "The Valley." In this region are Trumbull county, Mahoning county, Mercer county, Lawrence county, and Columbiana county. In House Bill 479, Mahoning county, where I grew up, is understandably paired with Columbiana county and a small portion of Trumbull county. Much to my surprise, Mahoning county was also paired with Lawrence

county! "Wow!" I thought, "I thought congressional districts were not supposed to transcend state lines!" As you can imagine, I was extremely disappointed to hear that Mercer county was not also included in the proposed district six to include at least part of each of the five counties that Paul Wetzel refers to as the "five county area" in his weather reports on WKBN 27 First News. Nonetheless, I was thrilled that lawmakers were respecting communities of interest. New Castle, Pennsylvania and Youngstown, Ohio are very close in proximity and share many interests on either side of the state line. To my dismay, I later learned that Mahoning county was paired not with Lawrence County, Pennsylvania but Lawrence County, Ohio. "How could that be possible?" I thought. "Lawrence county is the southernmost county in the state, and the city of Youngstown is less than 50 miles from Lake Erie, the state's northern border. In fact, the proposed district 6 spans over 190 miles from the northeast corner of Vienna Township in Trumbull county to the southeast corner of Lawrence county. Furthermore, there is no efficient way to get from one end of the district to the other, and there certainly is no efficient way to get from one end to the other while staying in the district. The fastest route to drive from the northeast corner to southwest corner of this district can be seen below in Figure 1 to take over 4.5 hours, traversing a path that is over 100 miles (nearly 54%) longer than the straight-line distance.

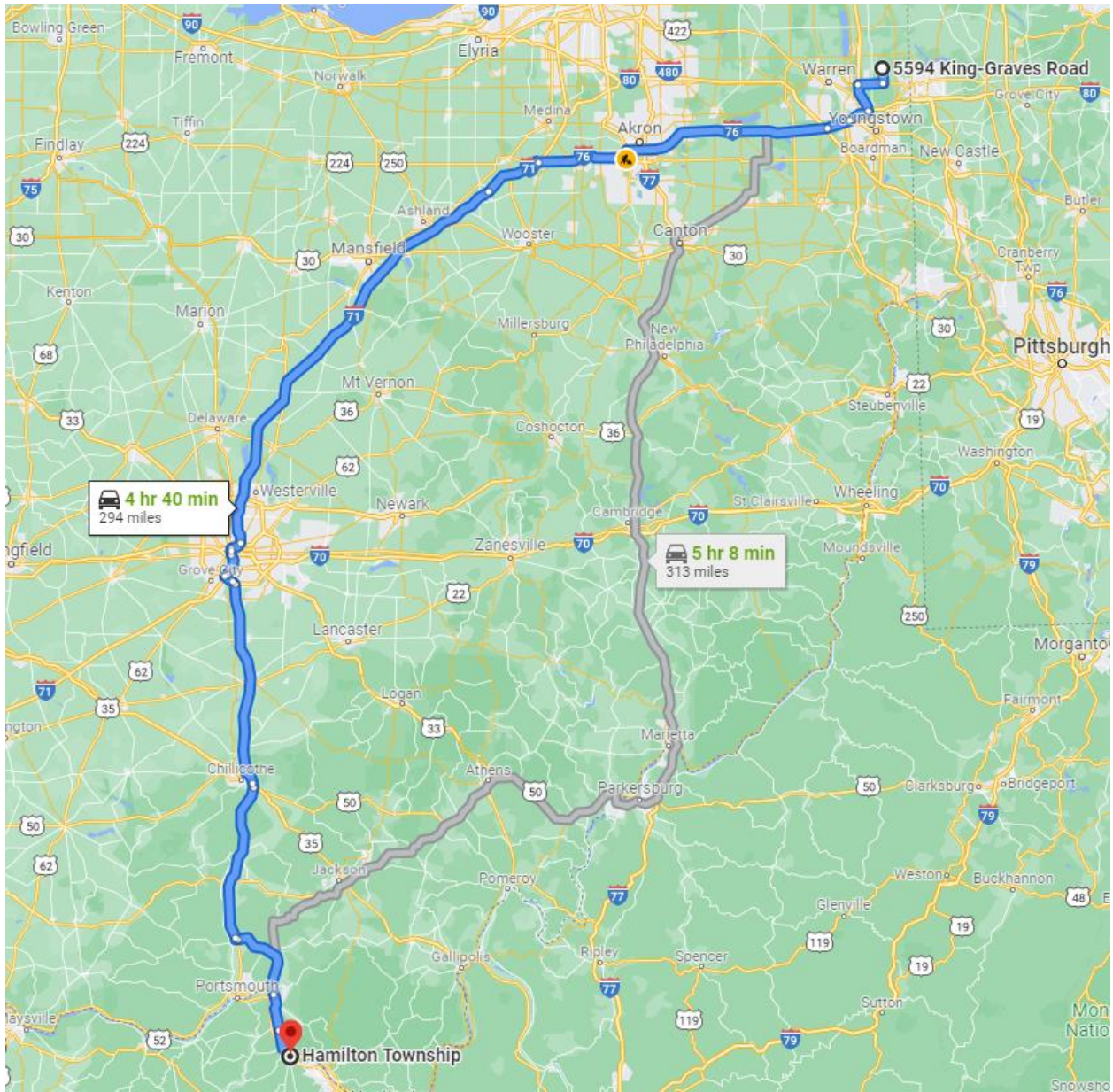


Figure 1: Fastest driving route from northeast corner to southwest corner of district 6. This route traverses through nine of the other fourteen proposed congressional districts.

Additionally, Figure 2 below shows that it takes nearly two extra hours (nearly 40% longer) to drive between these same two points while staying in the proposed district 6 while traversing a path that is almost completely off the interstate highway system and is 22 miles longer than that depicted in Figure 1. The route depicted in Figure 2 is merely an estimate, as I had to add about half a dozen intermediate points to ensure the route stayed not only within proposed district 6 but also within the state of Ohio.

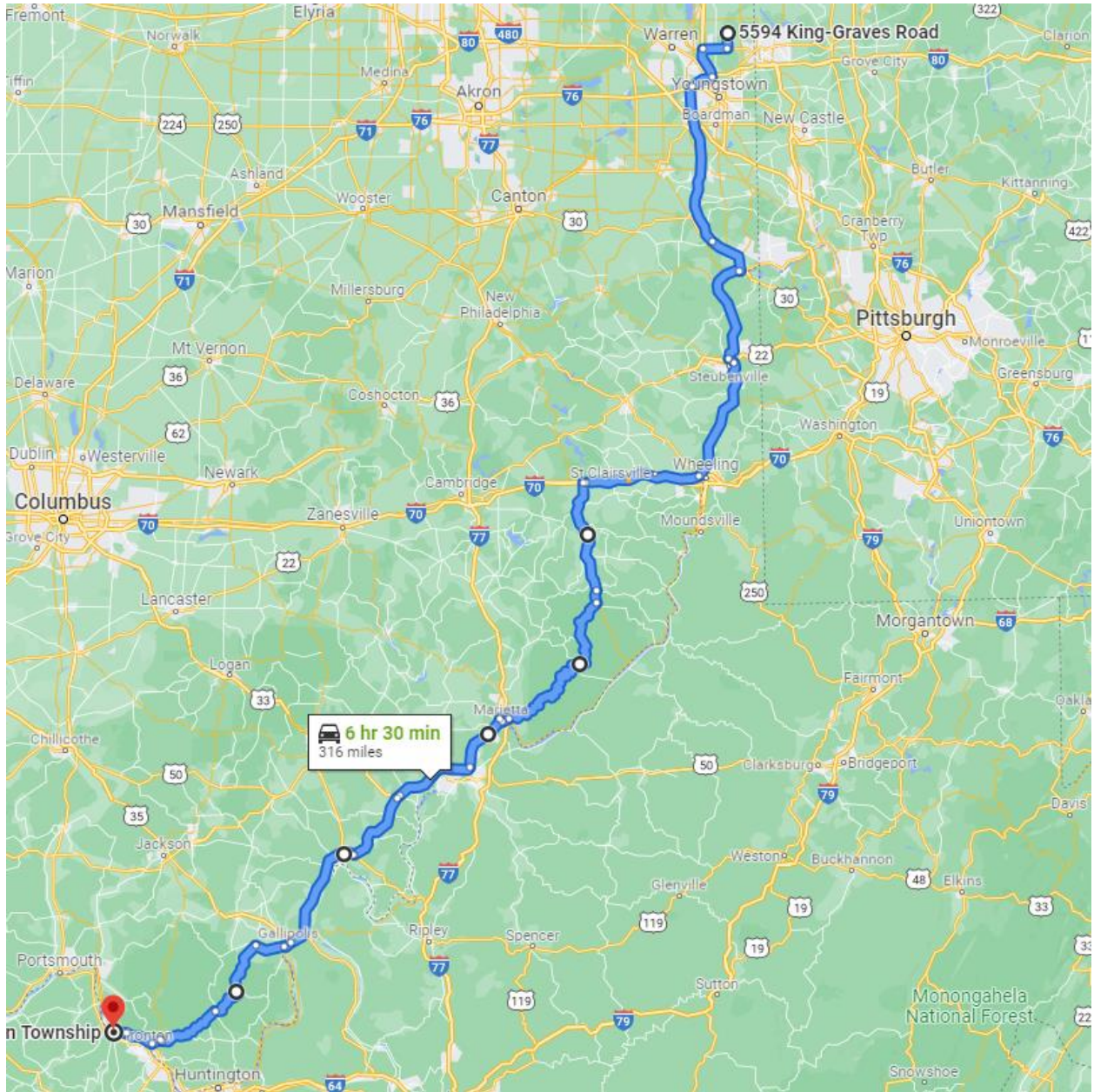


Figure 2: Approximate fastest driving route from northeast corner to southwest corner of proposed district 6 while staying in the proposed district 6 for the entire duration.

In comparison, to drive from the northeastern most portion of the state, Conneaut, to the southwestern most portion of the state, Miami Township in Hamilton County, it takes a just over 5 hours, as depicted in Figure 3.

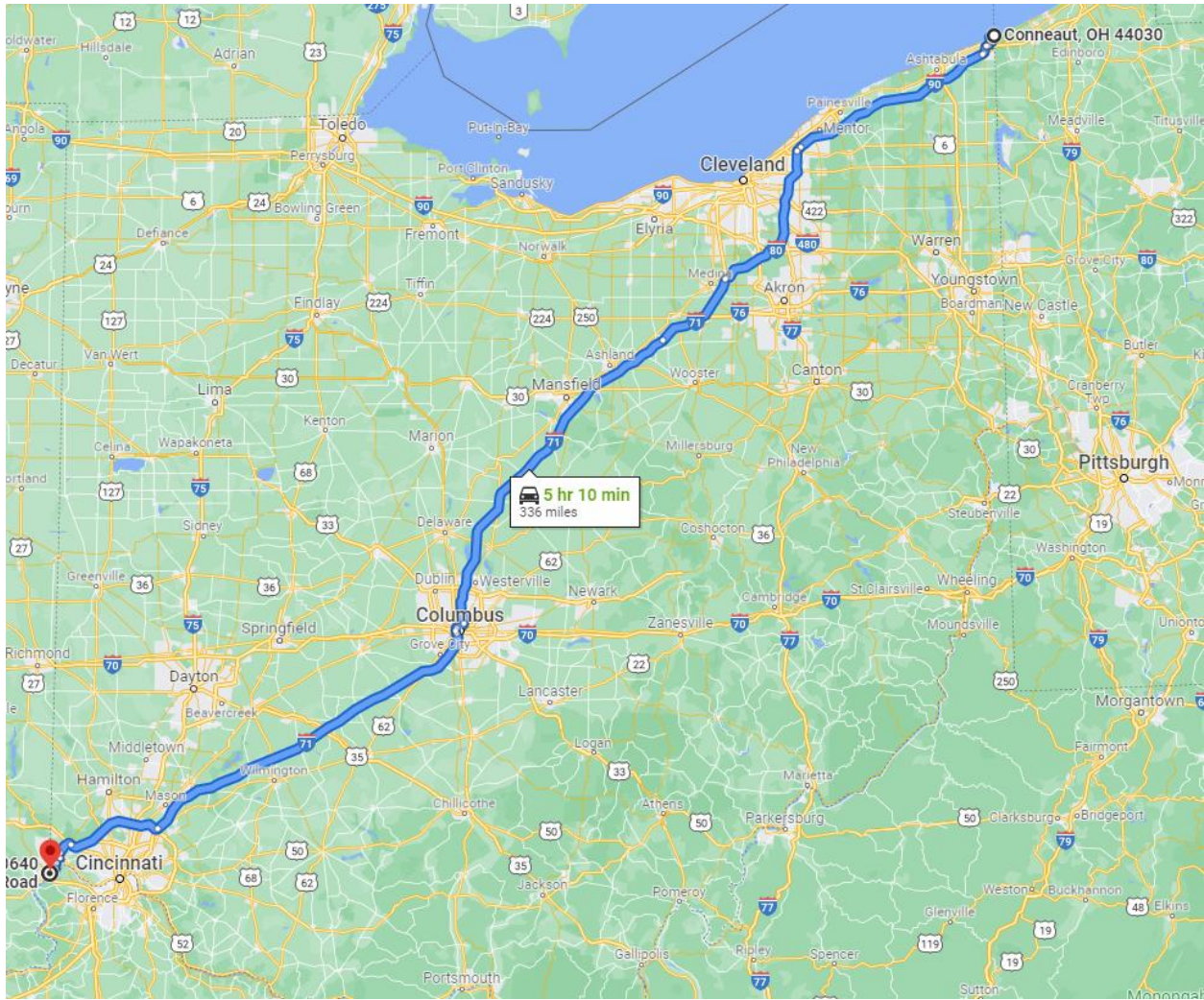


Figure 3: Fastest driving route from Conneaut, Ohio to Miami Township, Hamilton County, Ohio

The fact that it takes nearly as long to travel from one end of the proposed district 6 to the other (and longer if you stay in the proposed district 6) than it does to travel between the extremes in the corresponding directions of the state as a whole strongly suggests that the proposed district 6 is not compact and would pose a real challenge to whomever may represent it to ensure he or she is accessible to all of his or her constituents.

The following figures depict places that are as close to or closer to Vienna Township, Ohio, the northern most point in proposed congressional district 6, than southwestern Lawrence County, the southwestern most point in proposed congressional district 6.

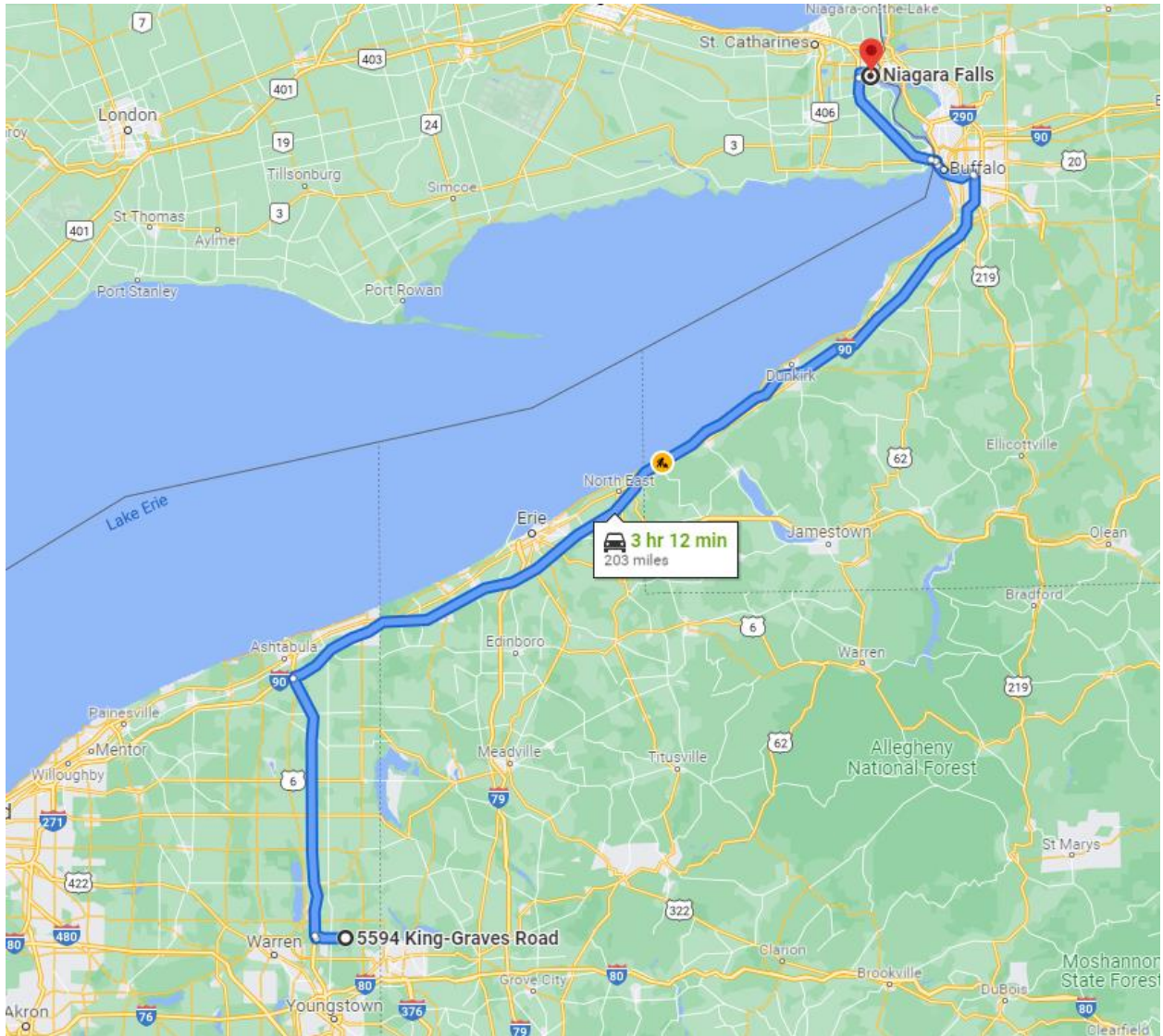


Figure 4: Fastest driving route from Vienna Township, Ohio to Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada is 91 miles shorter and nearly 1.5 hours shorter than it is to the southwestern most point in proposed district 6.

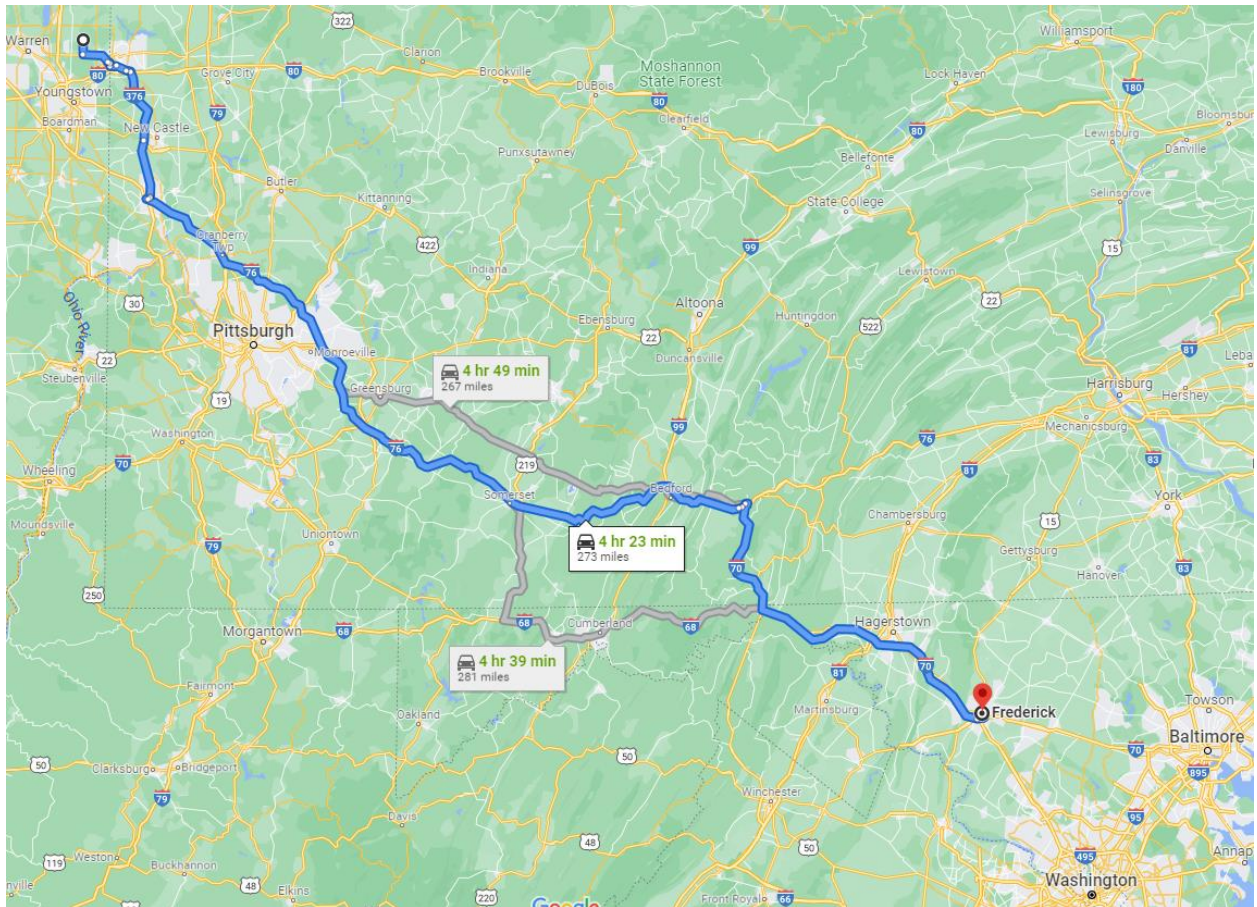


Figure 5: Fastest driving route from Vienna Township, Ohio to Frederick, Maryland is nearly 20 miles shorter and nearly 20 minutes shorter than it is to the southwestern most point in proposed district 6.

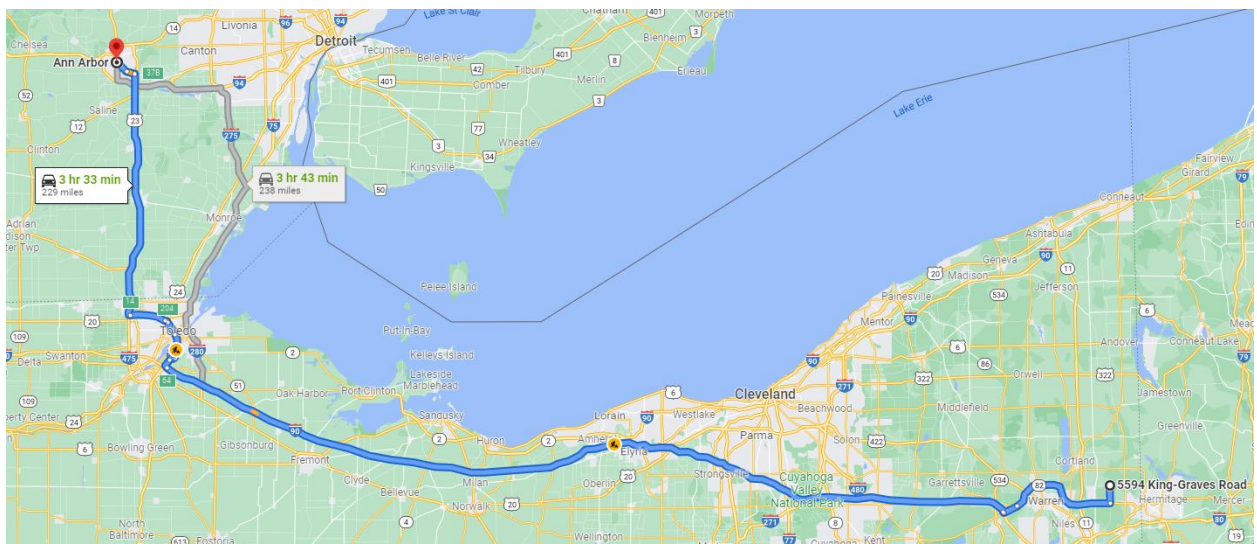


Figure 6: Fastest driving route from Vienna Township, Ohio to the city that shall not be named, Xichigan is 65 miles shorter and over an hour shorter than it is to the southwestern most point in proposed district 6.

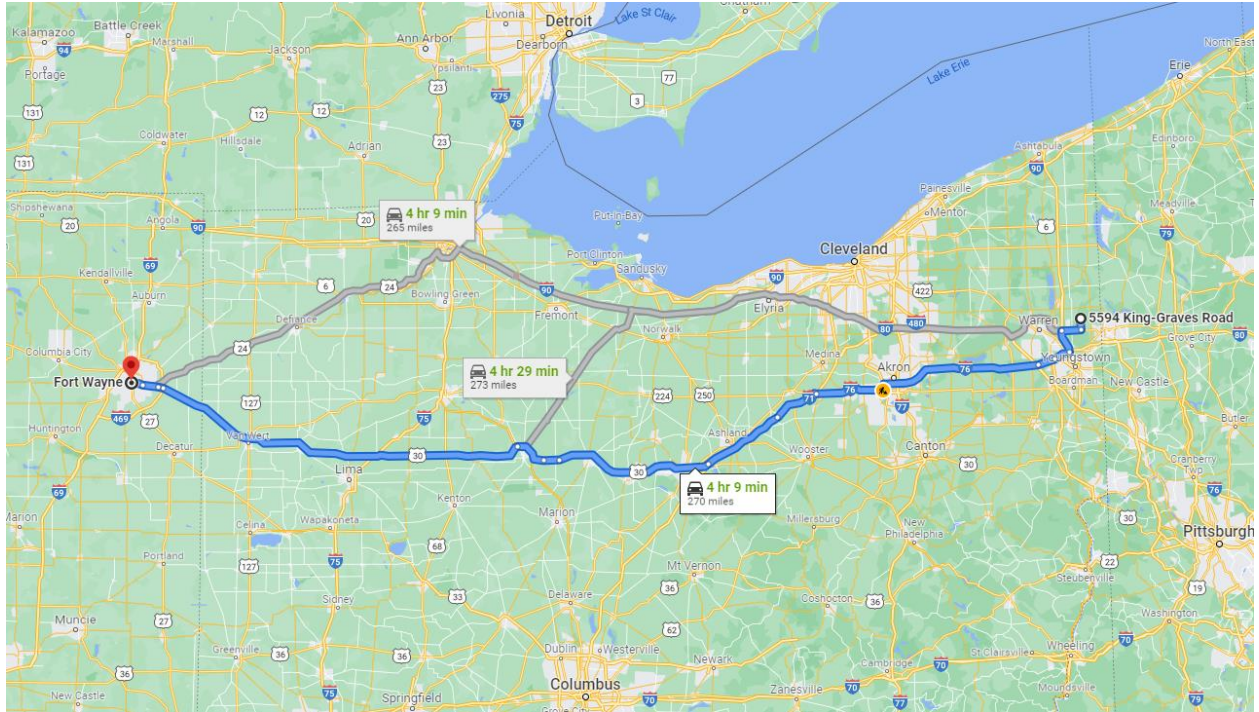


Figure 7: Fastest driving route from Vienna Township, Ohio to Fort Wayne, Indiana is over 20 miles shorter and over 30 minutes shorter than it is to the southwestern most point in proposed district 6.

The following figures depict places that are as close to or closer to Hamilton Township, Lawrence County, Ohio, the southwestern most point in proposed congressional district 6, than Vienna Township, the northernmost most point in proposed congressional district 6.

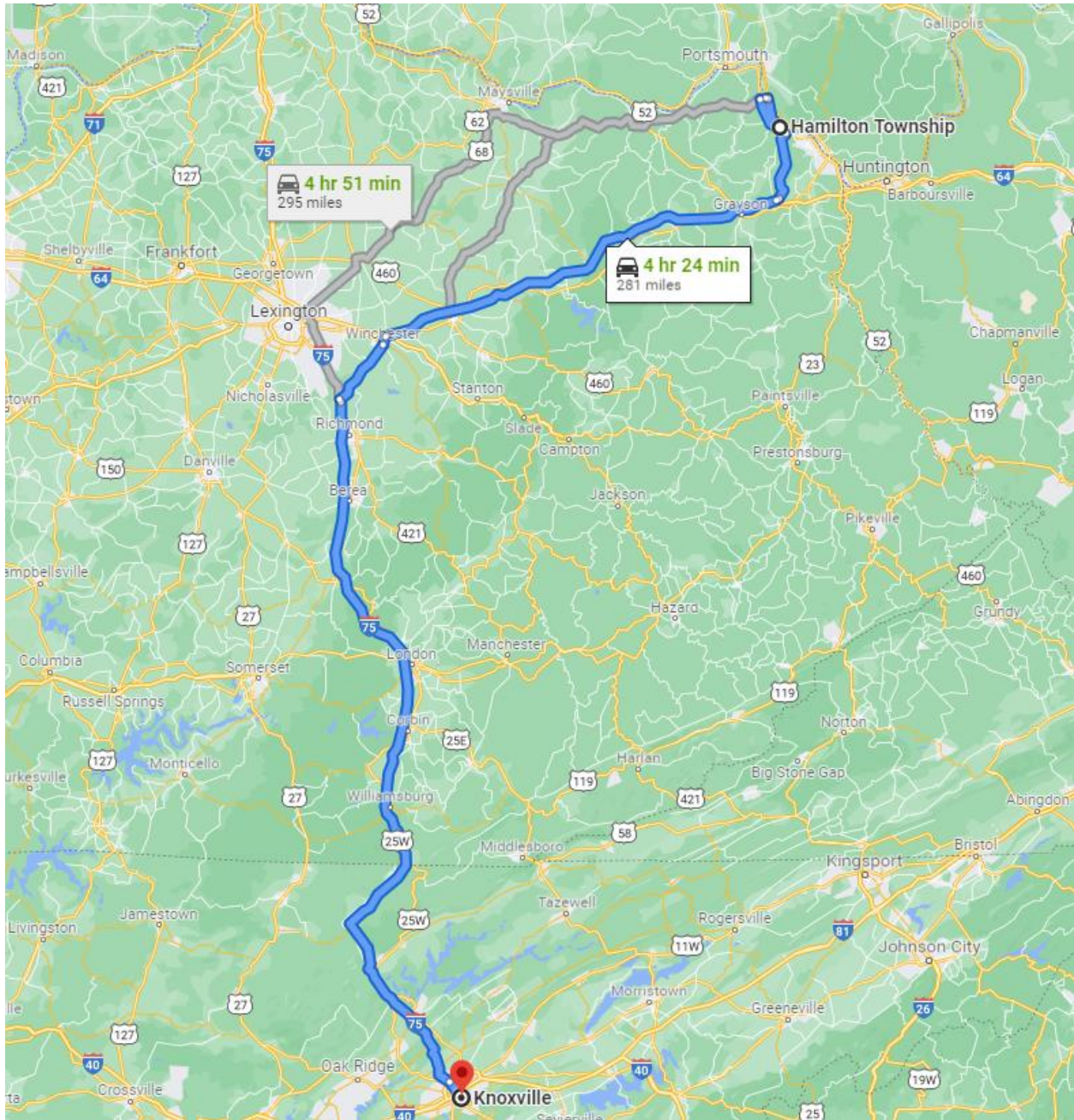


Figure 8: Fastest driving route from Hamilton Township, Lawrence County, Ohio to Knoxville, Tennessee is over 15 minutes shorter and 10 miles shorter than it is to the northernmost point in proposed district 6.

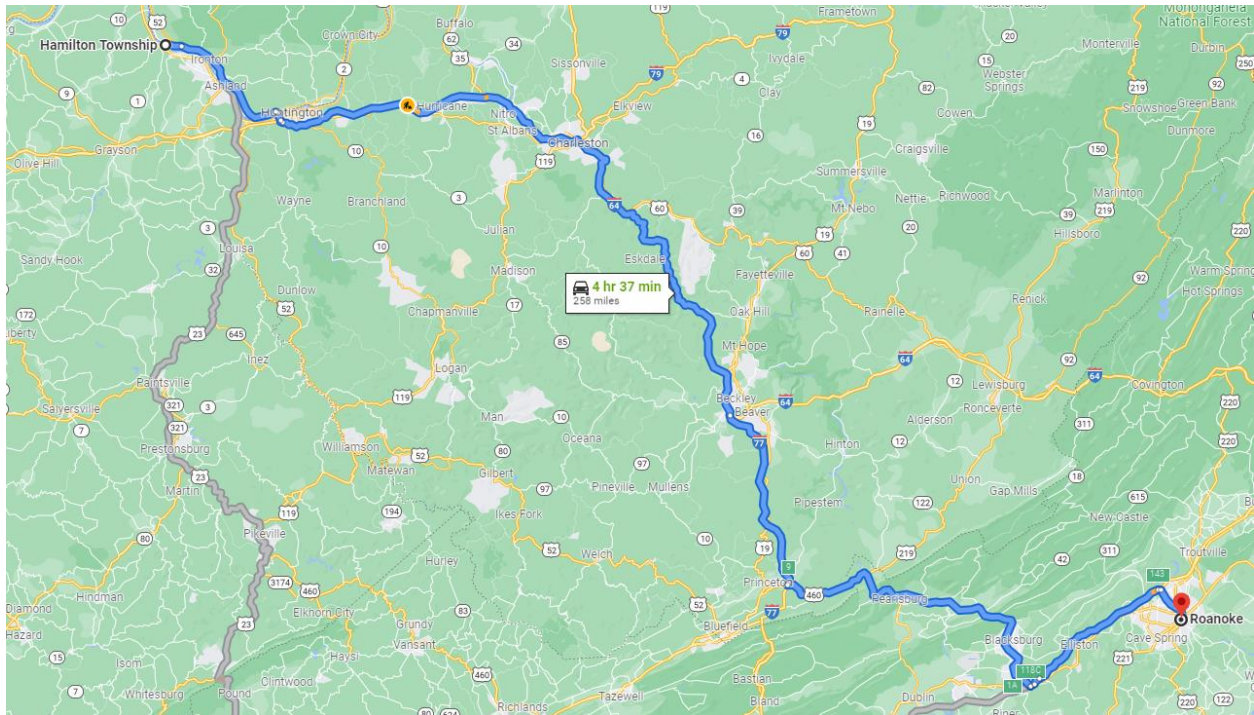


Figure 9: Fastest driving route from Hamilton Township, Lawrence County, Ohio to Roanoke, Virginia takes approximately the same amount of time as and is nearly 30 miles shorter than the route to the northernmost point in proposed district 6.

I believe the above figures help to illustrate how the geographic divide between the communities on either end of the proposed district 6 poses a problem. Having lived and worked in the proposed district 6 for many years, I can say that I have never been to Lawrence county, Ohio. In fact, of the eleven counties that are partially or wholly contained in the proposed district 6, I believe I have only been to five of them. Ironton and Youngstown are not communities of interest. Instead, Youngstown is separated from actual communities of interest. My father spent nearly 20 years working in the city of Warren, just a short drive away from his home in Austintown. Even so, the city of Warren is not in the same congressional district as Youngstown and Austintown under House Bill 479. In my high school days, there was a growing football rivalry between the Falcons of my alma mater, Austintown-Fitch and the Raiders of Warren Harding, just a short drive across the Mahoning-Trumbull county line. These two schools, while close in geographic proximity, are split between two congressional districts under House Bill 479. Additionally, the city of Niles is split between districts 6 and 14. This splits the southern, mostly residential, portion of the city from the northern portion, where the Eastwood Mall and other retail stores are located. Furthermore, the Eastwood Mall and the surrounding shops do not serve only the residents of the city of Niles but also surrounding communities, mostly in Mahoning and Trumbull counties. The line dividing district 6 and district 14 splits apart the communities that have a shared interest in the Eastwood Mall and nearby shops.

With the comments that I have made regarding the treatment of my community and the community in which I grew up in mind, I strongly urge the committee to vote no on House Bill 479 and for the good of all Ohioans, seek to draw a map that keeps communities with like interests together.

Finally, if any members of this commission or the legislature as a whole are considering to vote in favor of House Bill 479, I strongly urge them to review the map and accompanying analysis submitted to the Ohio Redistricting Commission website (<https://redistricting.ohio.gov/assets/district-maps/district-map-436.zip>) by me on Sunday November 7, 2021. This map utilizes many of the same techniques seen in House Bill 479 and also clearly favors one political and disfavors another. If anyone that supports House Bill 479 does not support this map, I would like a detailed explanation as to why, considering it is well within the explicit constitution criteria set forth in Article XIX, Section 2 and matches or exceeds House Bill 479 on various measurable metrics, including compactness and county splits.