

**OPPONENT TESTIMONY OF:**

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**IN OPPOSITION OF:**

SB 258

**[Columbus, OH, 10/4/21]** — Good morning, Chair Gavarone, Vice Chair O'Brien, and members of the Local Government and Elections Committee. My name is Amina Barhumi, I am the Outreach Director for the Ohio Chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, known as CAIR-Ohio, and a member of the Ohio Citizens' Redistricting Commission. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to present testimony in opposition of Senate Bill 258.

CAIR is America's largest civil liberties and advocacy organization for American Muslims. At CAIR-Ohio, we defend the rights of Ohio Muslims, including their voting rights. That is why we have been working since the beginning of summer to fight for fair maps. It is critical – as a community that so often experiences institutional discrimination and is so often either ignored or vilified by elected officials – that we have access to fair representation and that our votes are not diluted through gerrymandering.

That is why I have also been part of the Ohio Citizens' Redistricting Commission. We worked to model a thorough and robust public engagement process and developed and demonstrated citizen-derived principles of redistricting. We put forth our own congressional map in September with districts that reflected voter preferences and were based on community input and feedback. The very duties the Ohio General Assembly abandoned and neglected in September. The OCRC Congressional map has been attached to this testimony for reference.

The state legislative redistricting process was bad enough – but the congressional map drawing process has proven to be a complete failure thus far. Ignoring constitutional deadlines, giving very little notice to the public for these hearings, ensuring they are not accessible to the majority of Ohioans, and allowing the public and mapping experts less than 24 hours to review one of the proposed maps before the poorly scheduled hearings. These are just a few of the most egregious examples.

The redistricting process has crucial implications for future elections and policies that fundamentally shape our lives as Ohioans. Such an important responsibility necessitates a thorough engagement process that is measured, not rushed, clear and not convoluted or confusing, with perspectives from everyday citizens who know their communities best, and additionally with third-party mapping experts who understand the constitutional criteria under which to draw maps.

Unfortunately, the map proposed in SB 258 clearly violates those criteria and the reforms Ohioans passed to limit gerrymandering. Districts are gerrymandered to favor the Republican party, with initial analyses saying this map might allow Democrats only two seats. Constitutional criteria state that districts must be proportionately consistent with vote totals – which means a fair map would have 8 Republican-leaning seats and 7 Democratic-leaning seats.

This map also needlessly divides Ohio's urban and three largest counties – Hamilton, Franklin, and Cuyahoga – into **three** congressional districts each. It splits and lumps Cincinnati in with counties that vote predominately Republican, once again, even though a majority of Cincinnati, and Hamilton County in general, vote democratic. Furthermore, the Muslim community in Greater Cincinnati, which is predominately made up of people of color, spans the Clifton neighborhood, Mason (Warren County) and West Chester (Butler County) and has been split into three congressional districts, each of them lumped into majority white districts.

The east side of Columbus, with large Black communities which vote majority democratic, has been split up and lumped into districts with surrounding rural counties that vote majority Republican.

Toledo, which also comprises a large Muslim community and votes majority democratic, is also lumped in with white, Republican counties, therefore diluting their voting power.

I think we can all see the pattern here.

No matter which party you or your community is affiliated with, your vote should have the same power as your neighbors and colleagues. But this map suppresses the votes of too many people – too many in urban areas, people of color and those voting against the party which is currently in power. It is clear this map was drawn with one goal: to keep one party in power, and not to create districts in which *voters choose* which party receives power.

I have shared this before in previous testimony, but I will repeat it again: We are constantly hearing about the extreme divides in America. This would not be the case if our districts were drawn fairly, if our elections were truly competitive, and if every vote – especially those of marginalized communities like the Muslim community – had equal voting power.

I oppose this map and any gerrymandered map which violates the Constitution and suppresses our voting rights.

Thank you for your time. This concludes my testimony.