

TESTIMONY OF:

DEBRA S. SAUNDERS

PRESENTED TO:

THE OHIO SENATE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND ELECTIONS COMMITTEE, SB 237 and SB 258
OHIO STATEHOUSE

Columbus, Ohio November 09, 2021 – To Chair Gavarone, Vice-Chair O’Brien and members of the Ohio Senate Local Government and Elections Committee, Good Morning. I am Debra Saunders. I reside in Northwest Columbus with a Dublin address.

I was born and raised in Lima and lived there for my first 28 years. My father was a civil servant, serving his entire career as a police officer within the Lima Police Department. I have family that continues to reside in the area.

Senate Bill 258 vexes me. A carve out of the center of Columbus that falls within the proposed 4th district, the same district as Lima, creating a strange C-shaped formulation of the western side of Franklin County, where I live, appears to have purposeful intention. Living in Columbus, I am aware that in the past, I’ve been called the big shot from the city by some of my family, and please know that hasn’t created any rifts or awkward moments at holiday meals. But it does reflect the perceived differences that constituents hold within our state that are forged through lived experiences where we are, functional needs required for a quality of life based on where we live, and even, perhaps, a different worldview molded from our collective as a community.

As I stand here before you, our Ohio Senate members, your Senate body is led by a President from Lima, and the Ohio House is led by a Speaker from Lima. With Senate Bill 258, this Ohio Statehouse falls within the same district as Lima, adjoining Lima again to the center of government in our state. Please know that Lima remains a special place for me as it was my beginnings and my family is there, but a central urban area of a capital city is very different on many levels, from a municipality the size and structure of Lima.

Our Vote is Our Voice. Many experts have stated that Senate Bill 258 demonstrates extreme gerrymandering, and gerrymandering is designed to diminish the impact and influence of our vote to the benefit of those in power, most effecting those with limited voice: communities of color, communities of economic distress, those who are marginalized. These communities have always had to work harder to be heard. Will the voices of residents and voters of the east side of Columbus be heard as strongly by their U.S. Representative as those in the small towns and rural areas of the proposed 4th district?

I urge you to oppose Senate Bill 258. There are many excellent examples of maps drawn that abide by the Ohio Constitution and provide greater representation of the voters of Ohio, but if it is SB 237 that will be the alternate option before this committee, I urge this committee to use SB 237 as the guide by which congressional district maps are drawn.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.