

SB 258 Testimony
Michael W. Ahern
11/09/2021

Good morning Chair Gavarone, Ranking member Maharath and members of the senate Local Government and Elections Committee.

My name is Michael Ahern and I live in Blacklick, about seventeen miles from here and in the northernmost portion of the district that I've been drawn into, district 15. The southernmost town in the same district is Burlington Ohio along the Ohio River. I am sure the folks of Burlington are great people, but we have almost nothing in common. Between that community and mine lie the communities of Jackson, Athens, Nelsonville, Logan, New Lexington, Piketon, Waverly, Lancaster and a portion of Chillicothe. The small inroad of this proposed district that comes into Franklin County is largely democratic leaning, while the vast majority of the rest of the district is Republican leaning with the exception of the Athens area. While the district is competitive according to Dave's redistricting, it is one of three districts that carve Franklin County up. Franklin County and the city of Columbus are part of the community that I live and work in. The southeastern portion of Ohio has little in common with the needs of Central Ohio. Here is but one tangible and impactful way to understand this.

Members of Congress are tasked with many duties including advocating for their districts when it comes to spending federal money. In fact, federal funds make up approximately 37% of the state budget and are the largest single source of funds. One of the most tangible applications of those funds is through transportation planning and infrastructure projects where they constitute almost half of the Ohio Department of Transportation budget. Our transportation infrastructure is literally the economic lifeline to the wider national and international economy. ODOT supports this vital infrastructure through transportation projects. These projects are based on transportation infrastructure plans implemented by ODOT in conjunction with long range transportation planning developed by metropolitan planning organizations and regional planning organizations based on regional growth projections.

This proposed district map will hamstring Central Ohio in meeting the existing and projected explosion of growth in central Ohio by spreading my community's Congressional representation across at least five transportation planning organization jurisdictions. In fact, the southernmost planning organization is the KYOVA Interstate Planning Commission. The KYOVA is the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Tri-State area of West Virginia, Kentucky, and Ohio. That's not central Ohio.

Proposed district 15 is so large that whoever represents the district will have a very difficult time reconciling the very different needs of citizens within this vast district geographically and economically. How is a representative in Congress reasonably expected to advocate for and represent such divergent interests and focus. I submit that they simply can't.

Finally, rather than providing for strong representation in Congress for the Central Ohio region, this map also dilutes the power of representation by splitting Franklin County into three separate districts. In short, the splits and the resulting districts are illogical. Splitting Franklin County into three separate districts makes no sense economically, but based on the partisan carving of the county, seems to make sense to the GOP map drawers politically. In fact, the political focus of the map maker is highlighted in the five precinct splits that I observe in district 15. In each of those splits, the precincts carve democratic leaning areas of the precinct from Republican leaning areas of the precinct even though all voters within each of those precincts have the same transportation needs and share the same community interests. Such carving violates the letter and intent of the 2018 redistricting reforms to keep communities whole.

I urge you to not consider the map embodied by SB 258, and instead support approval of the map embodied in SB 237.

Sincerely,
Michael W. Ahern
Blacklick