

OPPONENT TESTIMONY OF:

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IN OPPOSITION OF:

HB 479

[Columbus, OH, 11/4/21] — Good morning, Chair Wilkin, Vice Chair White, and members of the House Government Oversight Committee. My name is Whitney Siddiqi and I am the Community Affairs Director for the Ohio Chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations – known as CAIR-Ohio. I'm from Cincinnati, and I am here today testifying on behalf of CAIR-Ohio. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to present testimony in opposition of HB 479.

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 our votes are not diluted through gerrymandering.

Yet, despite these efforts and despite the reforms Ohioans overwhelmingly voted for to secure a fair redistricting process this year, our leaders have failed us. 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, with perspectives from everyday citizens who know their communities best, and third-party mapping experts who understand the constitutional criteria under which to draw maps.

Unfortunately, the map proposed in HB 479 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 divides Hamilton County, where I live, into three congressional districts and lumps Cincinnati in with Warren County, which is predominately white and Republican-voting, therefore diluting the voting power of Cincinnatians and people of color. Furthermore, that proposed district 1 is not compact as required by the Constitution.

Near Columbus, Hilliard and Dublin, where one of Ohio's largest mosques is located and a large Muslim community lives and party control is a toss-up, have been lumped in with communities like Bremen, over an hour away and 94% white and 73% republican. With less than 24 hours to analyze and respond, I did not have time to do a deep dive, but clearly Toledo, where a large Muslim community lives, and other areas have also been gerrymandered.

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, 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.

Advocates and Ohioans like myself are tired and frustrated. But we're not giving up. 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.