

HB 479 Testimony

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Good morning Chair Wilkin and members of the House Government Oversight Committee. My name is Michael Ahern. I live in Blacklick and ranking member Brown is my state House Representative. I am registered as an unaffiliated voter and I have voted for members of each of your Parties over the years. I am here this morning as an opponent to the Congressional District map embodied in HB 479. There are many issues associated with this map statewide. However, I will predominantly focus on my district and my community of interest, Columbus and the Central Ohio region.

My district is district 3 in the proposed map. I will start with the positive - unlike my current congressional district that meanders over to Zanesville, district 3 in this map is wholly contained in Franklin County. However, as nice as that is, it is part of a coordinated effort to pack and crack the Columbus and Central Ohio community. The county is split across three districts with no logical basis. These splits undermine strong representation in Congress. Districts 4 and 15 are so sprawling, the congressional representatives would be hard pressed to adequately represent the divergent interests of, say, New Albany and Lima (district 4) or downtown Columbus and Newark (district 15) let alone advocate for those portions of their districts that land in Franklin County and central Ohio.

Why is this bad? Aside from tearing apart representation of key historic Columbus communities, this map is bad for central Ohio business. As you are aware, Columbus is booming. The Columbus way, combined with excellent educational opportunities and a highly mixed business community require focused representation in congress. Unlike the Brown/Galonski map, the HB 479 map does just the opposite. Additionally, sound planning is needed to meet the challenges that this growth will spur. Fundamental to meeting those challenges are basic infrastructure - roads, bridges, water and wastewater. 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 markets and 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 like the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Organization. MORPC serves as the U.S. Department of Transportation's designated metropolitan planning organization (MPO) for the Columbus urban area. This means they identify where and how transportation investments occur in the region – specifically within the MPO boundary. This map ignores the importance of focused advocates in Congress that align with the majority of the MORPC area of jurisdiction - particularly the high growth areas of Northeastern Franklin and Delaware counties. These two high growth areas have business needs and priorities that are completely different from Wapakoneta and Lima. This map does a strong disservice to all of the business communities unfortunate enough to be in district 4. When these communities suffer as a result, so too does Ohio in population retention, job growth and many other economic parameters.

And finally, district 3 and district 15 split apart another significant central Ohio economic driver. The vital interests of the Columbus Regional airport Authority are diluted by this map. Port Columbus is located in district 3 while Rickenbacker Airport is sited in district 15. Strong, focused community-based representation in Congress for these vital logistics resources is extremely important as the region continues to expand. These two foundational economic infrastructure resources interact with and are directly affected by the military, federal programs and legislation. The map associated with HB 479 undermines the ability of the State and the Columbus Regional Airport Authority to rely on focused representation in Congress. That's bad for business, that's bad for Central Ohio, and that's bad for Ohio in the competition of regional and worldwide markets.

For these reasons alone, I urge you to reject the map embodied in HB 479.