

OPPONENT TESTIMONY OF:

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IN OPPOSITION OF:

SB 237

[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 related to Senate Bill 237.

CAIR is America's largest civil liberties and advocacy organization for American Muslims. At CAIR-Ohio, we've been working since the beginning of summer to fight for fair maps here in Ohio. It is critical – as a community that so often experiences institutional discrimination, is so often either ignored or vilified by elected officials – that we have access to fair representation—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 also 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.

Fair maps cannot be achieved without a fair process.

The map at hand currently, proposed in SB 237, is a starting point for at least reflecting voter preferences with a proportional seat count of 8 Republican-leaning seats and 7 democrat-leaning seats and provides pathways for communities of color to be represented. It's a good start, however, improvements can certainly be made.

For instance, it makes much more sense to include the Ohio State University and surrounding areas, including up into Clintonville with the Columbus-anchored congressional district 3, rather than shifting those areas to the new congressional district 15.

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.

Such a diligent process cannot be facilitated in a matter of weeks, with hearings scheduled during work hours for most Ohioans, and with incredibly short notice for preparation and testimony.

Thank you for your time. This concludes my testimony.