

Good Morning Chairman Faber, Chairman Huffman and the other members of this committee. Thank you for holding these hearings around the state to allow community members, like myself, to communicate our areas of concerns in the Ohio redistricting process.

My name is Kalitha Williams and I am citizen of Columbus, Ohio on the Far East side located in Fairfield County. I moved there a few years ago and like the good citizen that I am, I registered to vote in my new community. Imagine my surprise to find that I was now located in a new Congressional District, the Ohio 7th Congressional District. When I pulled a map of this Congressional District I found that my small neighborhood was sliced and included in a district that is stretched to about 100 miles and includes 8 counties including Franklin, Fairfield, Perry, Pickway, Fayette, Greene and Clark Counties. Columbus, Ohio is the largest populated city in Ohio and it did not make any sense to me that my neighbors and I were grouped with a constituency of people who were not like us. My community's interests are not like those of people in Greene and Clark and Perry Counties. The concerns of urban centers are the same as those of predominantly rural areas. I am providing my own personal story to emphasize why communities of interest should be an important factor in the drawing of Congressional Districts in Ohio.

A few weeks ago, The CHANGE Agency, a nonpartisan not for profit organization focused on increasing the civic and political participation of Young Black Professionals in Ohio, of which I am a partner, sponsored an event focused on the Ohio redistricting and reapportionment process. The event was entitled "Why doesn't Franklin County have a Black Congressman?" Our panelists included Jim Slagle of the Draw the Line Ohio Project, former State Senator Ray Miller and a GIS professional with the Kirwan Institute of Race and Ethnicity. A discussion ensued between the panelists and our audience members about the disservice that has been done to the African American community in Franklin County, in that this important community of interest has been divided into two

Congressional Districts. Instead of uniting these areas into one Congressional District the predominantly African American neighborhoods of Driving Park, Southside, the Near East Side, Linden, Hilltop and others have been divided and surrounded by small towns and rural areas that cannot begin to understand the needs of urban communities. While it is unlikely that uniting these neighborhoods into one district would create a majority-minority district, it would allow this important community of interest to have strong voice and have greater influence on the issues that concern them.

Currently, Franklin County is divided into three Congressional Districts the 12th, 15th and the 7th. It is clear by the way these districts were drawn that the goal was to drown the voice the urban community Columbus, Ohio that is unfortunate. Columbus, Ohio has real urban concerns that deserve to be heard in Washington, DC, our nation's capital.

The Brennan Center for Justice, a nonpartisan public policy and law institute of the New York University School of Law, defines communities of interest as “a group of people concerned in a geographic area who share similar interests and priorities...”. Currently 24 states consider communities of interest as a factor in their redistricting process. Nearly half the states in this country work to ensure that citizens who share the share the same interests and concerns stay together. I challenge this committee to make Ohio the 25th state to demonstrate a commitment to unite our communities and not diluting their voices.