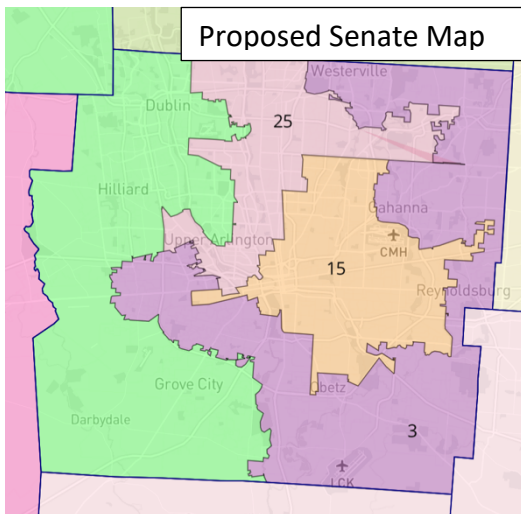


Co-Chair Sykes and Speaker Cupp, Members of the Ohio Redistricting Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Deacon Nicholas Bates, JD. While some of you may recognize me from work around hunger, budget and tax policy, today I am here representing myself as a resident of the Hilltop neighborhood in Columbus.

I am connected to my neighborhood in many ways. I am a volunteer soccer coach for my daughter through Westgate Recreation Center and have volunteered for many seasons. I am an active member of the Westgate Elementary School PTA and my wife currently serves as the president of the PTA. I serve on the advisory board of the Hilltop YMCA as well. Today, I will draw upon my personal experience as a Hilltop resident since August of 2007 and my work in the community.

Districts should represent communities. The political boundaries you draw should correlate to natural communities that exist. You can look at neighborhood schools, where people shop, or where people go for swim lessons and soccer games. Many of us are very concerned that the proposed map divides up the Hilltop in unnatural ways that will be a long-term barrier to our voices being heard. Proposed House districts 1, 6, 7, and 10 and Senate districts 3, 15, 25, and 16 divide the Westside like a turkey on Thanksgiving Day.



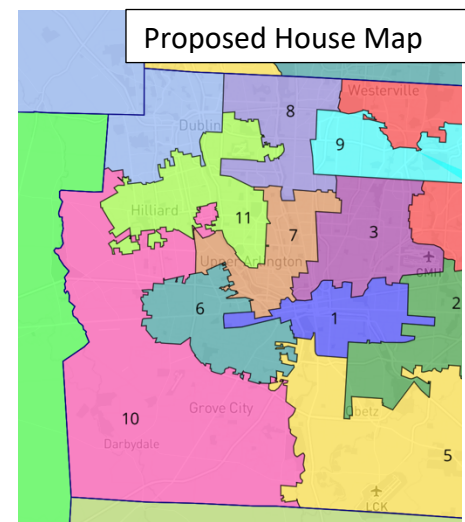
The Rev. Kevin Orr of the Hilltop Shalom Zone told me,

“As the pastor of two United Methodist churches in Westgate, but who serves the people of the Hilltop, this configuration that removes Westgate from the Hilltop is deeply offensive.”

This map mutes the voices of Hilltop families and squanders the great potential of our community by dividing us into four separate House and four separate Senate districts. The reality is that the proposed Senate districts are unlikely to produce any state Senator from the Westside neighborhoods.

While the Hilltop contains great diversity, we are one Hilltop community. Our political districts should reflect that.

For example, Westgate Rec. Center has participants from across the West side of Columbus. My daughter’s pee-wee soccer team (6- & 7-year-olds), *The Fire Breathing Dragons*, has 13 players who attend at least 8 separate elementary schools that would be divided between



multiple legislative districts. Similarly, Westgate Alternative Elementary school has students from multiple neighborhoods in the Hilltop, not just Westgate.

The Hilltop YMCA is dedicated to the entire Westside. As an advisory board member, I have personally interacted with people from throughout the west side of Columbus at our branch. Neighborhoods on the westside such as the Westland, Wedgewood, Westgate, Wilshire Heights, Holly Hill, Georgian Heights, Cherry Creek, Lincoln Village, Brookshire, Southwest Hilltop, Highland, even Hillard, Grandview and Upper Arlington come to our Y. We are one Hilltop Y; we should be more connected in our Senate and House representation too.

These maps also don't respect businesses and their customers as a community. The Westgate Businessworks set up at 13 North Westmoor, just North of Broad Street. Despite having the name '*Westgate*' in the name of this small business effort, they would be divided out of both House and Senate district of the Westgate neighborhood.

A local leader in Westgate who is heavily involved with the Summer Jam West festival and the Farmer's Market told me,

"The Westgate neighborhood is part of the Hilltop, and should not be placed in a different district from the rest of the neighborhoods that comprise the Greater Hilltop area. This division would be very confusing for constituents, as well as a disservice to Westgate to be separated from so many residents who share the same needs and concerns as we do".

Uniting the Westside into **compact districts** will strengthen our voice at the statehouse, not to benefit any partisan interest, but to benefit our community interests. Whether our Representatives and Senators are in the majority or minority party, we will know we have our advocates at the statehouse.

Please modify the House and Senate maps to keep Westgate on the westside and make sure our political maps parallel the communities so that leaders in these chambers know their neighborhoods and can be an effective voice for us.

Thank you.