

Before the Ohio Redistricting Commission
Testimony of Stephen Michael Kellat¹
Hearing Held at Punderson State Park, September 25, 2023

I want to thank the commission for choosing to holding one of its three mandatory hearings in northern Ohio. Ohio is the 7th largest state in the union in terms of population and 34th largest in terms of area. Conditions in the Columbus area and the area around Deer Creek State Park likely do not resemble conditions in areas like Ashtabula, Conneaut, and Geneva out in far northeastern Ohio.

At the Deer Creek State Park hearing, co-chair Faber engaged in an enlightening colloquy with witness Catherine Turcer about keeping cities, townships, and counties whole. As a resident of Ashtabula County, I can say we were not blessed with being able to keep our county whole. Under the *Gonidakis* map, that is to say the map imposed on Ohio due to the decision in *Gonidakis v. Ohio Redistricting Commission*, Ashtabula County was carved up with House District 99 being mostly based in Geauga County and a strip in the northern half of Ashtabula County remaining in the district. That strip included just enough territory south from the lakeshore to include the incumbent's home. The remainder of Ashtabula County was attached to House District 65 which is primarily based in Trumbull County and still has lobes in Mahoning County.

In turning to the Commission's current working map, we see problems arise. The map shows a marked indifference to local culture and local geography. Geneva Township, Geneva City, Harpersfield Township, and Geneva on the Lake Village form a single community of interest even though they are four separate political entities. The existence of multiple Joint Economic

¹ Mr. Kellat holds an earned master's degree in library science from Clarion University of Pennsylvania. He is an adjunct instructor at a community college in Pennsylvania teaching digital literacy and commutes there from Ashtabula. He has also previously served as a precinct election official at a variety of precincts in Ashtabula County.

Development Districts, called JEDDs in the trade, show that there is no interest in these entities merging so as to satisfy the arbitrary and capricious whims of mapmakers. People in that area worship together. The commercial center is the intersection of Broadway and Main Street in historic downtown Geneva City.

The proposed map splits this community of reference by putting some but not all of Harpersfield Township, Geneva on the Lake Village, and some but not all of Geneva Township in House District 99. The remainder would be placed in House District 65. This would be a new change compared to the *Gonidakis* map.

This change creates consequences. For example, consider the community of faith known as Geneva Church of Christ located next door to the post office on Broadway in Geneva. It has congregants from Harpersfield Township, Geneva on the Lake Village, Geneva Township, and Geneva City as well as people who drive in from Saybrook Township and Ashtabula City. If a member of that church decided they want to run for the statehouse to challenge the incumbent in House District 99, they wouldn't be able to ask half their fellow worshippers for petition signatures! Churches are a vital source of social bonds in the strange times we live in and this map sunders that.

This map solidifies House District 99 as being an extremely safe seat for Republicans thanks to the core of Republican-trending voters in Geauga County. Except for the land bridge to get to the incumbent's home, the majority of the area in Ashtabula County selected as part of the new 99th district happen to vote mostly Democratic. Ashtabula City is the population core of the county and trends Democratic in its voting. Conneaut City does much the same. Attaching them to Geauga County in this matter helps render their voices moot and ensure that good Get Out The Vote efforts by Democratic Party candidates don't really matter unless they spend large amounts of time in Geauga County.

Over the weekend I loaded the block assignment list into Dave's Redistricting to try informally to move precincts around to make Ashtabula County whole in one district. I couldn't do it based upon the map drawing rules and with how the rest of the map was already drawn. When Ashtabula County was previously contained as a whole in a single district it was competitive and had both Democrats and Republicans represent it whether it was Deborah Newcomb, L. George Distel, or Casey Kozlowski. The Neutral Partisan Map from Geoff Wise comes closest to keeping the county whole and the tendrils from Lake County from House District 57 would at least keep similarly situated people in a similar situation in terms of representation as much as possible.

Keeping Ashtabula County whole helps us maintain our distinct character. Our voters in the lakeshore part of Ashtabula County have precious little in common with the voters of landlocked Geauga County. Our voters in rural southern Ashtabula County have less in common with post-industrial Trumbull and Mahoning counties than your mapmakers seem to believe. As much as I was surprised David Pepper didn't have a whiteboard and marker with him last Friday to illustrate matters, this is something he would've been able to illustrate quite well for the commission's benefit.

People are not interchangeable widgets. There is not one single, monolithic Ohio. Honor the diversity of our great state in the maps you create.

Thank you. I'm happy to answer any questions you might have.