

**PROPONENT/OPPONENT TESTIMONY OF:**

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**IN SUPPORT OF:**

Equal Districts for All Ohioans  
Ohio Redistricting Commission

**[Cincinnati, OH, 8/24/21]** — Good afternoon, Co-Chair Cupp, Co-Chair Sykes and members of the Ohio Redistricting Commission. My name is Whitney Siddiqi. I live in Cincinnati, and I am here today testifying on behalf of the Ohio Chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations – known as CAIR-Ohio. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to present testimony in favor of equal districts in which every person’s vote holds equal weight.

As a civil rights and advocacy organization for Ohio Muslims – and a proud member of the Ohio Citizens’ Redistricting Commission and the Equal Districts Coalition – CAIR-Ohio has been working for several months to fight for fair maps.

Muslims, who are often the subject of political discourse, rarely have the opportunity to advocate for themselves. As it stands, Islamophobia, racism and xenophobia pervades our political system, leading to the creation of discriminatory policies and laws. This emphasizes the need for diverse representation among elected officials. At the very least, Muslims should have adequate representation in government that will be accessible and responsive, much less advocate for our needs.

That is why we have been working so hard to educate and mobilize our Ohio Muslim communities around this subject. Through redistricting education events in Columbus, Dayton and Cincinnati, we have submitted 100 community maps to the Ohio Citizens’ Redistricting Commission (OCRC) Public Portal, showing citizens’ perspectives of their own communities. We have helped numerous community members submit written testimony to this commission. And we continue to have important conversations about redistricting and our political system with Muslims from every background: college students – our future leaders, doctors, community volunteers, parents, religious leaders, and young professionals, to name a few.

It’s a complex subject but as soon as people understand how redistricting has diluted their voting power and rigged our elections in Ohio, people become frustrated, appalled, and passionate about this subject – this is not the democracy our community members studied in civics class or learned about when immigrating to the United States. It is critical that as citizens we understand how redistricting has pushed our nation and specifically Ohio to the political extremes, leading to predictable election

outcomes and disengaged voters, and perhaps most significantly, how it has diluted the voting power of marginalized communities by splitting our communities.

One example is Cincinnati. I live in the Oakley neighborhood of Cincinnati on the east side. This is a popular, up-and-coming neighborhood for young professionals and young families. My neighborhood and others are included in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Congressional district, which includes Clermont, Brown, Highland, and other counties, which I never frequent and have no connection to. While one of the mosques I attend in Clifton, along with the other part of Cincinnati, is included in the 1<sup>st</sup> Congressional district. Both districts have republican representation in Congress.

By splitting Hamilton County, which votes majority democratic, into two congressional districts with surrounding counties that are majority republican communities, map drawers ensured that Cincinnatians could not elect the officials that represent their views and concerns.

Additionally, because of the way previous maps were drawn, parts of Cincinnati are also split into state districts with state representatives that do not share the same values as their constituents. For example, the neighborhoods of West Price Hill, East Price Hill, and Lower Price Hill in Cincinnati have been placed into House District 29, House District 30, and Senate District 8, which all have white, Republican representation despite the fact that these neighborhoods are diverse and vote majority democratic.

No matter which party you're affiliated with, you deserve adequate political representation. My hope for this round of redistricting is that Cincinnati will not be split up in such a way that dilutes the collective voting power of this community.

Another example is the division of the large Muslim community that spans West Chester and Mason just north of Cincinnati. Although there are county and city boundaries, our Muslim community – and the broader Mason and West Chester communities – are closely connected, living, interacting and using resources across both areas. They are members of both the Islamic Center of Greater Cincinnati in West Chester and the Islamic Center of Mason, go to halal grocery stores and restaurants in both areas, and send their children to schools across both areas, including the Islamic school in West Chester, which serves the entire Greater Cincinnati region. Our Muslim community in this area has shared interests and resources, yet are split between House Districts 52 and 53, Senate Districts 4 and 7, and the first and eighth congressional districts.

This makes it impossible for minority communities to advance issues which matter to them and affect their daily lives. This suppression of political power is especially harmful for communities who are racial and religious minorities, experience institutional discrimination at a higher rate than others, and are typically not being engaged by elected officials.

Ohio politicians have proven that they will act in their own self-interest, rather than advancing the needs of their constituents. This is evident in the ways this supposedly public process has been undermined. Thus far, we have seen this commission and governor DeWine seriously challenge the spirit of the redistricting reforms Ohioans overwhelmingly voted for. These public hearings were scheduled a week before the first map deadline and during work hours for most Ohioans; the process to submit testimony was quietly announced three days before the first hearing; and several commissioners have been skipping these hearings altogether. Fair maps come from a fair process, and we are deeply concerned that is not what we're getting here today.

We are constantly hearing about the extreme divides in America. This would not be the case if our districts were drawn fairly, if our elections were truly competitive, and if every vote – especially those of marginalized communities like the Muslim community – had equal voting power.

Thank you for your time today. This concludes my testimony, however, several other members of our community wished to speak and were not able to be here today due to the hearing taking place during the workday. If the commission will allow me, I would like to read excerpts of testimony from two community members who could not be here today.

**Mukarram Khan:**

Please prevent gerrymandering. I am a resident of Butler County, Ohio since 2006 (16 years). I live in West Chester, OH and I have my own office in Anderson Township and a second location in Springboro. My community spans a large area of people of diverse cultures, religions, and backgrounds.

The current Ohio House and Senate maps are unfair and unacceptable. They were created by those in power only to keep the same parties in power or swing the electorate in Ohio to one side.

My main reason for this opinion is that my elected representatives do not share my same views or ideals. I have reached out to them in the past many times to raise concerns about national and local issues only to be ignored. Any responses from them have been rare and only been form letters totally dismissing the opinions and concerns of myself and my community members.

**Tariq Rehman:**

I currently live in Ohio's 1st Congressional District, in Warren County. I was born and raised in the Greater Cincinnati region, often wondering why the Muslim-American voice has often been overlooked in our region.

As a Muslim-American who lives in one of the most gerrymandered states in the country, I am concerned that my community's voice and voting power is getting diminished and divided unfairly. A large number of Muslim families and professionals live in the Greater Cincinnati region, with a substantial population in Butler and Warren Counties. However, due to gerrymandering and district lines, our votes and our ability to advance issues that concern our community often get swept aside.

In a time where Americans hold overwhelmingly negative ideas and biases towards Muslims, in which we're sometimes even assaulted and discriminated against, it is essential that we have the ability to elect representatives to uphold our rights.

Their full written testimony has been submitted to the commission.