

Testimony - Richard

Good day and thank you to Representative Mary Murphy and to everyone attending this testimony for hearing me speak, and listening as I share my thoughts on Congressional redistricting in the third district. My name is Richard Jennis and I am here today to speak as a Community Organizer for African Career Education and Resource and as a concerned individual who has seen problems within the third district firsthand and knows how the redistricting process affects these communities.

My first consideration is how the districts are being mapped. Sometimes communities with common interests and similar investments are divided. Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center, for instance, have similarly diverse populations, and a number of common points of interest such as Churches, Mosques, Synagogues, small businesses, and shops that are essential in both communities. Other northwestern suburbs of Minneapolis including Crystal, Robbinsdale, and New Hope are also connected by common values and interests. Accordingly, I recommend to everyone here that in the redistricting process these communities stay together so that they can elect officials who understand and represent their needs, and so that issues unique to these communities can be collectively addressed.

Another concern is what happens after the districts have been drawn. All too often, underprivileged areas are overlooked by local government, while more affluent communities receive the benefit of government attention and policy. I have personally been to apartments with rodent and insect infestations, no security system to stop intruders from gaining entry, totally unresponsive management and maintenance, and ruthless rent demands, even amidst the Covid crisis. The northwest suburbs of Minneapolis, including Brooklyn Park, Brooklyn Center, Crystal, Robbinsdale, and New Hope were already particularly vulnerable before the epidemic, and a government pattern of overlooking these locations has only furthered that divide.

Government officials can address the needs of these parts of Congressional District 3 by going out to the area and having conference meetings, imposing serious penalties and restrictions on predatory landlords and management systems, and ensuring proper assistance in Section-8 and general subsidized housing. All of these issues have been relevant and repeated concerns for residents for far too long, and the stories I have heard of renters being refused rental assistance by housing authorities, even as it is readily accepted in more affluent suburbs around Minneapolis, continue to this day.

In the redistricting process, the temptation is often to divide districts according to what serves the political parties of the mappers or according to some agreement. The maps are often drawn in bizarre, meandering form in order to throw certain members into convenient districts or increase the chances of certain political outcomes. I am asking that the primary consideration for redistricting be the community alignments and common interests of nearby cities, the unique needs of each area, and the opportunity for individuals with long-overlooked needs to politically unite within those districts.

Once the maps are made, I am entrusting local representation in Congressional District 3, which is my district and the district of the people I serve through my position, with the task of fair, equal, and equitable representation. While the challenges of the epidemic, poverty, and broaching government gridlock are great, I have never lost hope that the power of community and advocacy are greater. The driving force for change and for community betterment starts

with a mapping process that is uniting, unselfish, and respectful of common core community interests.

Thank you once more to Representative Murphy and for everyone who gave their time today to hear about community issues. Your drive to better communities and address the needs of the people who live there comes with the ability to make tremendous change.