

Heather Olsen

Testimony opposing HB0001 and supporting HB0002

I live in Hyattsville, in Prince George's County, a little over a mile from the District line, and currently reside in the 4<sup>th</sup> congressional district. I mention this latter fact because unfortunately telling you I live in Hyattsville is not sufficient information to tell you what district I'm in. When I saw the map prepared by the Maryland Citizen's Redistricting Commission, I was pleasantly surprised to see that I didn't need to zoom in to see what district I would be in, because this compact map placed all of Hyattsville in the same district. Yet when I looked at the LRAC map, I found that once again I needed to waste a lot of time with the zoom feature to find out what congressional district I would be in, because on the LRAC map the line between the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 5<sup>th</sup> districts snakes through the middle of Hyattsville. When districts are drawn in this way, citizens often don't know which district they live in or who represents them, making them less likely to be engaged. The representatives are just as uncertain. Several years ago, I called my congressional office with a problem I needed constituent service help with. I was already extremely frustrated by the problem and found it doubly frustrating that I had to wait while the staff member looked up my address and determined that I did in fact live in the district before she could attempt to help me with my problem, something that would not have been necessary if the maps had been drawn keeping municipalities together.

The Maryland Citizen's Redistricting Commission map places Hyattsville and other nearby communities in northern Prince George's County and eastern Montgomery County together in a compact district whose suburban residents, many of whom commute to the district, have similar priorities and concerns. On the LRAC map, the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> districts snake around each other in a bizarre fashion, and the 4<sup>th</sup> district now includes a section of rural southeastern Anne Arundel County, an area with very different priorities and concerns from those of my neighbors. It's tempting to see this as an attempt to gain partisan advantage, and no doubt partisan considerations came into it, but I don't think it's that simple. The reality is that no matter how the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> districts get drawn, both are going to vote reliably Democratic. The line between the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 5<sup>th</sup> districts could be drawn so that both districts are compact and respect municipal boundaries, while keeping their partisan makeup roughly the same as they are on the LRAC map. Why, then was the map drawn in this way? One is forced to conclude that they were drawn this way because a powerful longtime incumbent congressman prefers to choose his voters rather than allow the voters to choose who represents them, and the LRAC map reflects his wishes.

I believe citizens should choose their representatives, rather than the other way around, and urge you to support HB0002 and reject HB0001.

Thank you for your time and consideration.