

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE REDISTRICTING COMMITTEE  
MACOMB, ILLINOIS  
APRIL 28, 2011

Good afternoon. I am David Gay from New Canton, Illinois along the Mississippi River in Pike County. I am president of the Pike County Farm Bureau. I appreciate this opportunity to present testimony on behalf of the organization. We also appreciate the effort by the Senate and House to seek public input on the redistricting process.

Pike County is one of the largest counties in Illinois yet has a population of only 17,000 people. Agriculture and outdoor based tourism are the leading industries. The county is bordered by the Mississippi and Illinois rivers.

As further background, portions of Pike County are in the 47<sup>th</sup> and 49<sup>th</sup> Senate districts, the 93<sup>rd</sup> and 97<sup>th</sup> House districts, and the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Congressional districts. This has provided us with a unique opportunity to access six legislators on issues important to agriculture and rural life.

Unlike the State legislative districts which are compact and contiguous, the 17<sup>th</sup> Congressional district in which I live meanders through Pike County only to connect it with points south and east in Illinois. We sincerely hope that any redistricting proposal eliminates this type of gerrymandering.

Agriculture is vitally important to the State of Illinois. It is our state's largest industry. It employs 1 out of every 8 jobs in the state, and 94% of all Illinois farms are family owned. Illinois has one of the top state economies dependent on agriculture in the nation.

In addition to farming, Illinois is a leading state in agricultural related industries such as soybean processing, machinery manufacturing and foreign exports.

Despite agriculture being the state's leading industry, the number of us residing in rural areas or having any connection to a family farm continues to decline.

We want to make sure that family farmers are not adversely affected by new maps that dilute agricultural interests and disenfranchise rural voters.

The new maps should be drawn to include agricultural districts that represent the majority of farmers in that area and would allow rural residents to have a say in future elections. Illinois farmers want the chance to elect legislators who have an understanding of agriculture and connection to rural areas.

Finally, we request that proposed district maps should be made available for public review prior to their approval by the Illinois General Assembly. Hearings should be held in all parts of the state, including downstate Illinois.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify.

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