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RE: Judicial Redistricting

Dear Chairman Forgety and Members of the Advisory Task Force,

I was scheduled to speak at the Public Meeting in Harriman on May 20, 2019 but unfortunately I had to leave before it was my turn to address you. Mr. Tyler Weiss did an admirable job in my stead and presented to you the resolution from the Monroe County Bar Association representing the unanimous objection from the voting members opposing any plans to redraw the 10<sup>th</sup> Judicial District and, in particular, swap Monroe and Meigs County. I write to you today to express what

I would have said but also to address the only public comment I am aware of in support of changing the 10<sup>th</sup> Judicial District.

As a little background, I have been a practicing attorney in the 10<sup>th</sup> Judicial District for a little over thirteen years. I have been a prosecutor, a public defender, and now a private practitioner. My family has lived in Monroe County for over two centuries and I grew up there. I now live in McMinn County and have done so for roughly seven years. I work out of the Athens office of Worthington and Weiss, my child attends school in McMinn County, my wife is a school based therapist in the Athens and McMinn County School systems, and I am a member of the McMinn-Meigs and Monroe County Bar Associations.

I say all of that so that when I say Monroe County is not a “geographical outlier” as has been suggested in a public comment, I clearly draw on personal knowledge and experience. Monroe County and McMinn County share a continuous border unseparated by any natural barriers. They have similar population demographics and are of similar size. They share a State Senator, a Congressman, and a State Representative and obviously have shared judicial officials for over four decades. Monroe County simply does not have similar ties to the 9<sup>th</sup> Judicial District. Monroe County is divided from Loudon County for a large part of its border by the Tennessee River. Monroe County does not share a common border at all with Roane County or Morgan County nor does Monroe County have any real or substantial ties to either of those counties. Monroe County does have substantial ties to all of the other counties in the 10<sup>th</sup> Judicial District. Monroe County shares a common border with Polk County and many of the residents of Monroe County have family members that live in Polk County. The Church of God, which has its headquarters in Bradley County, was started in Monroe County and there are many people in Bradley County that are related, by blood or marriage, to people in Monroe County. I would submit that the lack of any real ties to the 9<sup>th</sup> Judicial District is why there has been no support, public or otherwise, from the citizens of Monroe County in support of moving Monroe County into the 9<sup>th</sup> Judicial District.

It was pointed out in the resolution from the Monroe County Bar Association but it bears repeating. In the 10<sup>th</sup> Judicial District, Monroe County citizens have access to three (3) Circuit Judges, one (1) Chancellor, and one (1) Criminal Court Judge. If Monroe County were to be put into the 9<sup>th</sup> Judicial District, the citizens of Monroe County would have one (1) Circuit Judge, one (1) Criminal Court Judge, and one (1) Chancellor. Perhaps this is why no elected official from Monroe County that I am aware of has expressed support for any changes. In point of fact, I am not aware of any public comments, other than the one submitted by an attorney that appears to have been practicing less than a year, in support of swapping Monroe County and Meigs County. I am not aware of any public statements in support of such a change from Lowell Russell, State Representative for the 21<sup>st</sup> House District representing part of Monroe County and part of Loudon County. I have not heard any support from Mark Cochran, State Representative for the 23<sup>rd</sup> House District representing part of McMinn County and part of Monroe County. I have not heard any support from Mike Bell, State Senator for the 9<sup>th</sup> Senatorial District representing part of Bradley County, McMinn County, Meigs County, Monroe County, and Polk County. These three individuals, elected to represent the people directly impacted by any changes, would surely be speaking up if this was the will of the people. I respectfully submit it is not.

Finally, I would like to point out the political reality. I am not aware of any public support, other than what I have already mentioned, for moving Monroe County out of the 10<sup>th</sup> Judicial District. It is my understanding that there were two other speakers at the public meeting in Harriman who spoke against moving Monroe County and Meigs County. One was a representative from 10<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Criminal Court Judge Sandra Donaghy and the other speaker was 9<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Criminal Court Judge Jeff Wicks. This leads me to the inescapable conclusion that any proposed changes are being driven by some private interest and not sound public policy. I trust any recommendations from this Advisory Task Force will reflect the latter and not the former.

With kindest regards, I remain,

Yours Truly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "S. M. Hatchett", is written over the typed name. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and "M".

Stephen M. Hatchett, Esq.