Hello.

My name is Susan Owens. I am the mother of children in 4th and 2nd grade at Clarksburg Elementary, and a 3-year-old in preschool. I live in rural Boyds, an area defined by old neighborhoods that borders the Agricultural Reserve. In Option 11a, the area “south of West Old Baltimore and west of I-270” refers to a portion of rural Boyds – a separate and distinct area that is not part of the new Cabin Branch development. My neighbors and I are here this evening because our voices have been drowned out during this process.

We firmly believe that rural Boyds should not be included in this boundary reassignment, based upon your own criteria of demographics, school utilization, and geography.

Geography. I urge you to take a close look at the map of the affected area. Many of our families live way out on Slidell or Barnesville Roads. In fact, my children currently have a 40-minute bus ride home from Clarksburg Elementary because their bus travels out to these remote areas before they can be dropped off on the right side of 121. From Neelsville Middle School, the ride could easily exceed an hour. An hour that that could be used for homework, afterschool activities, or eating dinner. Have you considered the burden of an hour-long bus ride from these areas – past one middle school to get to another?

Demographic Balance and School Utilization. Our area, “south of West Old Baltimore and west of I-270,” looks large on the map, but is sparsely dotted with homes. In fact, the number of elementary school children in this area is 26. For comparison’s sake, the Cabin Branch development, has 221 elementary school students, and it is only half built.

Twenty-six students from rural Boyds, an average of FOUR STUDENTS per grade, is not significant enough to rebalance the demographics or school utilization rates of any school that they attend. And yet, they would suffer the greatest geographic hardship if Option 11a was adopted as written.

So I repeat, the inclusion of the area “south of West Old Baltimore and west of I-270,” the second bullet point in this recommendation, makes no sense given the factors you are trying to satisfy. It should be deleted from Option 11a.

An additional concern is our children’s sense of community. This recommendation splits rural Boyds. Our families find each other at our children’s school events - not through a community HOA, clubhouse, or pool. We discover common ground through yardwork challenges, the snowblower vs shovel debate, and how to trick-or-treat in an area with only a handful of houses.

I grew up in a small town on the edge of the Allegheny National Forest in northwest Pennsylvania. I spent hours playing in the river and my parents’ back yard. But I wanted more for myself than what rural Pennsylvania had to offer, so I worked hard and graduated from Cornell University. When I had children of my own, I wanted them to have access to amazing schools, but also to experience the rural joys of my childhood. I found the best of both worlds in rural Boyds. My family has neighbors who ride by on horseback, and easy access to amazing views along Little Seneca Lake – all while living a short drive away from the amazing Montgomery County public schools. We feel a kinship with other families who sought a rural homestead instead of a new house in a crowded development. Option 11a unfairly chips away at this community.
The area “south of West Old Baltimore and west of I-270,” the second bullet point in the recommendation, does NOTHING to further your factors of school utilization or demographic balance, but creates a negative geographic impact on our children.

Remove the area “south of West Old Baltimore and west of I-270” from Option 11a.

Thank you.