



Prentiss Haney

TESTIMONY OF:

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IN SUPPORT OF:

Maps proposed by the Ohio Citizens' Redistricting Commission
submitted to the Ohio Redistricting Commission

[Columbus, Ohio] Good afternoon Co-Chair Cupp, Co-Chair Sykes and members of the Ohio Redistricting Commission. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today. My name is Prentiss Haney and I live at 918 Windsor Street Cincinnati, Ohio 45206, which is in House District 24 and Senate District 9 in recently struck down state legislative maps. I am also one of the plaintiffs from the Ohio Organizing Collaborative vs. the Ohio Redistricting Commission case. Today, I am thankful the Ohio Supreme Court did not uphold the maps because if those maps passed in 2021 were upheld my community wouldn't have the power in Columbus that is our due and we wouldn't have a say in the issues that affect our lives. But today we have a second chance to draw fair maps.

I understand that, according to the Ohio Redistricting Commission itself, using past statewide results, the General Assembly district plan that it adopted has 85 districts (64.4%) favoring Republican candidates and 47 districts (35.6%) favoring Democratic candidates out of 132 total districts (both Senate and House). That proportion of districts favoring Republican candidates is disproportionate to the number of votes cast for those candidates (about 54%) over the last ten years. This disproportionality means that I, as an organizer and supporter of Democratic candidates, would need to secure far more votes and support for my candidates and positions than a Republican voter would need to secure. In short, by drawing maps to favor Republican candidates, the General Assembly district plan gives greater value to a Republican vote than to my vote.

We need fair representation in this state, which means the number of Democratic and Republican seats in the House and Senate need to correspond closely with how Ohioans actually vote – in the past, roughly 46% Democrat and 54% Republican.

Two times, Ohioans voted in overwhelming numbers to reform our constitution to build a more fair, democratic governing process together. Yet the majority party leadership of this commission continue to support proposed maps that fail to meet the basic requirements of the constitution and fail to honor the spirit of these reforms. There have been thorough and robust processes like the one led by the Ohio Citizens Redistricting Commission which was much more accessible to many parents and working people and produced fair, proportional maps with fair opportunities for minority communities to make their voices heard. We must pass fair & representative maps now and the Ohio Supreme Court agrees that the commission must do so if possible. And it is possible.

I'm a firm believer that every vote and every voice should count--that's the foundation of our democracy. But the truth is that many of us, especially in the Black community, are not heard because politicians have tilted the scales of the democratic process through unfair maps that weaken the power of our votes. They're gerrymandering districts so they can basically select voters who will keep them in office--and when this happens, those lawmakers often ignore us and the issues we care about.

My mom and sister work in the care economy and my grandmother is retired. We need much better infrastructure to care for elderly folks, as well as young children. There are hundreds of thousands of women of color just like my mom who are fighting for better resources for her patients and also for herself, so she can live and retire in dignity after a lifetime spent caring for others. Many services are not accessible and people continue to struggle; It's not because they don't use their voice and vote, it's because there are politicians in our Statehouse who have decided their voices shouldn't matter. That's not how democracy is supposed to work.

Our democracy is in crisis. Folks like my mom, who work six days a week, 12 hours a day in service and caregiving, can't afford for lawmakers to ignore their voices. And she's just one of countless others, mostly women of color, who deserve to be heard. Fair maps mean that her voice matters as much as the person who lives two or 10 miles from her and earns four times as much. That is how democracy is supposed to work. But right now, the process is broken and it pushes people to the margins, encourages them not to engage, and can even criminalize participation.

We don't have the luxury to sit and wait for things to change so people like my mom and sister, who do the hard work of caregiving each and every day, can be heard. We can't sit on the sidelines--we need to join the fight for fair maps to make sure our voices are heard. No one else is coming to save our democracy except us.