

**SPONSOR TESTIMONY OF:**

Chris Tavenor

1145 Chesapeake Avenue Suite 1, Columbus, OH 43212

**IN SUPPORT OF:**

Maps proposed by the Ohio Citizens’ Redistricting Commission

submitted to the Ohio Redistricting Commission

**[Columbus, Ohio]** Chris Tavenor, Staff Attorney, Ohio Environmental Council Commission Member, Ohio Citizens Redistricting Commission

Co-Chair Cupp, Co-Chair Sykes, and all honorable members of the Ohio Redistricting Commission, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony for your consideration. I am Chris Tavenor, Staff Attorney for the Ohio Environmental Council. Ten years ago, when Ohio last considered its legislative district maps, I wasn’t even yet old enough to vote. I came of age during a tumultuous economic recession, watching the impacts of perpetual war overseas while becoming increasingly worried about the looming threat of the climate crisis. With those thoughts in mind, I’m particularly excited to testify in the 2021 redistricting process.

The OEC specifically opposes the current map under consideration by the Ohio Redistricting Commission, as originally proposed by the Ohio Senate President. Instead, we urge this Commission to adopt the Ohio Citizens’ Redistricting Commission’s (OCRC) Unity Maps, maps designed to follow all of the rules outlined in Article 11 of the Ohio Constitution. I was fortunate enough to be a member of the OCRC over the past few months.

The OEC opposes any form of gerrymandering designed to support particular political parties. To that end, we believe the most important rule included in the 2015 constitutional amendment is its commitment to proportional partisan representation. Ohio’s legislative maps must represent communities, lived experiences, and geographies, while also creating a legislature that does not favor one party over another through district design.

The map currently under consideration violates these principles, as written in Article 11, Section 6, with 66 Ohio House districts favoring the Republican Party (>50% Republican partisan lean), and 31 districts favoring the Democratic Party (>50% Democratic partisan lean), and two districts where both parties have less than 50% partisan lean, one slightly favoring Republicans, the other slightly favoring Democrats.

In contrast, the OCRC’s map upholds the constitutional requirement of proportional representation. It creates a map with 55 districts with >50% Republican partisan lean and 44 districts with >50% Democratic lean.

To further illustrate how the Redistricting Commission’s proposed districts were drawn to favor a particular political party, it’s also worth noting which districts have more or less than 119,186, the number it would take to have every Ohio district precisely equal. That’s not strictly possible, but it’s a constitutional requirement to get close. 16 Democratic-leaning districts have more than than that 119,186 number, while 36 Republican districts (more than the total number of Democratic-leaning districts in the entire map) have less than 119,186, with fourteen Republican districts having populations 4% less or more than that 119,186 number.This is almost as many districts that have been given to the Democrats with greater than 119,186. By creating more Republican-leaning districts with less population, gerrymandering has been made to be much easier.

The map currently under consideration also fails to maintain compact districts.

I live in Columbus. Central Ohio and Franklin County have plenty of examples illustrating how the proposed map fails the compactness requirement of Article 11, Section 6. The senate district proposed to be made up of districts 4, 5, and 6, for instance, loops from the Hilltop area all the way through Groveport, up to New Albany, and eventually ends in Westerville. Similarly, the senate district composed of Districts 10, 11, and 12 covers Grove City and Darby Dale, scoops up Hilliard, Upper Arlington, and Dublin, and stretches all the way to Marysville.

We can get more granular, noting the way Western Columbus is divided to pull sections of Norwich Township into House District 10. District 1 oddly stretches from Bexley all the way down Sullivant Avenue to Westgate. These districts are drawn in oddly shaped ways to achieve particular partisan purposes, most likely the Republican-leaning senate district dominating the

western half of Franklin County in these proposed maps.

The OCRC’s map makes much mores sense for Franklin County when considering how the people who live here actually define our communities. Similar communities, like Hilliard and Dublin, are included in one house district, alongside Upper Arlington and Worthington in their own house district. As a speaker noted in their testimony on Thursday, the OCRC districts are mathematically more compact than the map currently under consideration by a significant degree.

Ohio voters deserve an explanation from the supporters of the map currently under consideration. Section by section, we need to see the math and work done that shows how it satisfies the requirements of the Ohio Constitution.

The Unity Map of the OCRC upholds the spirit and literal language of the 2015 constitutional amendment, creating a district map furthering the will of Ohio voters. And the OCRC also submitted a report outlining specifically how it satisfies the constitutional requirements of Article 11. Thus, the OEC urges the commissioners to reject the current map under consideration and adopt the OCRC maps.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony on behalf of the Ohio Environmental Council.