

Members of the Redistricting Commission:

I am Karen Leith and reside in House district 37 and Senate district 27.

My comments are based on two broad experiences:

First, as a League of Women Voters member for the last 41 years, I have been part of our campaigns to put the issue of drawing maps on the ballot, even locally chairing our last effort in 2018. Currently I work on advocacy, especially issues that allow every voice to be heard and respected.

Second, as a retiree from the Catholic Commission of Summit County, one of 5 social justice offices for the Diocese of Cleveland, I spent 30 years, the last 7 as executive director, bringing the most vulnerable to the table. Our mission was making sure that all voices were heard and respected.

My observations and comments:

- As a resident of House District 37, I know the benefits of a fair and compact district. Our district keeps flipping between parties based on issues of importance at the time. As a result, over the years, our representative, and candidates in election years, have always been responsive to calls for dialogue. We don't always agree, but we come away with a better understanding of the issues, the possibilities and the reasons for decisions. I want fair districts because I want that experience for all Ohioans.
- With Senate District 27, while the responsive experience is the same, the perspectives on the issues are more varied because we have been grouped with a rural area in Wayne County instead of our County Seat, Akron. Summit County, with its Council form of government and united by its incredible park system, needs to stay together since we already cooperate on so many issues. I know that there are other areas with similar concerns for districts.
- Having worked with and for the people of Summit County, I know the importance of keeping communities together so that they can unite their voices and work for the common good. Fair districts should keep communities together, especially around school districts and county lines.
- As someone who has worked over the years to help people find their voice, I am disappointed in this Commission. Many have been calling for these hearings to start weeks ago. More times that respect working people and students could have been arranged. Better locations that go out to where people are – and do not cost for parking – could have been chosen. Not everyone has discretionary income that can be used for parking in order to testify. Voices that need to be heard cannot be here.

I hope that this Commission takes seriously the fact that over 70% of voters in all 88 counties voted in favor of transparency and fairness in drawing districts so that voters are choosing their representatives.

Thank you for your consideration.