

Written Testimony Submitted to the OHIO REDISTRICTING COMMISSION

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Submitted by: **Maureen D. Welch**

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Thank you to the Co-Chairs, Ohio Redistricting Commission, Speaker Cupp and Senator Vernon Sykes, for the opportunity to provide written testimony. I will NOT be testifying in person due to health concerns.

I am a resident of Guilford Township in Medina County, Ohio. Like all Ohio districts in 2011, Medina County's state legislative district lines were gerrymandered in an egregious manner, with north/south stair step lines which became more convoluted as they severed both Medina and Brunswick cities and the county itself in half. As part of the gerrymandered Ohio 7th and 16th U.S. congressional districts we were split yet again with meandering north/south lines cutting through our cities and townships creating a situation where our state legislative and U.S. representatives are clearly not beholden to constituents.

Leading up to the 2018 vote for redistricting reform which garnered over 70% approval from voters, I was one of many who stood on street corners, in front of libraries, and at festivals talking with voters in Medina County while offering them a Fair Districts petition to sign. Speaking with Republicans, Independents, and Democrats and showing them Ohio's 2011 state legislative and U.S. Congressional maps, most saw the glaring gerrymandered districts and were eager to sign. It was heartening to hear that Medina County voters are interested in keeping their communities together and know convoluted district lines only benefit the politician. They followed up by voting for redistricting reform at the polls.

In 2021 I've been facilitating community mapping sessions for citizens in Medina County. Another chance to listen to voters. I've heard that people from Medina County use services in Fairlawn, Akron, Strongsville, and Cleveland - they work, shop, spend leisure time, and receive healthcare in the larger metropolitan areas, as well as enjoy services in their own communities. Many Wadsworth residents and south county residents cited the ease of access to I71 and I76 with easy access to services throughout NE Ohio as one of the reasons they moved to Wadsworth or southern Medina County. Residents are concerned about the environment, the tax base, education, and healthcare. There is also a rich agricultural heritage in Medina County with small family farmers concerned about maintaining their acreage and supporting their families and a way of life. All these concerns can be better addressed when Medina County remains whole and represented by one state legislator and is wholly in one U.S. congressional district rather than divided.

When Medina County is kept whole, then citizens in our cities and townships can work together on common concerns, petitioning our legislator and KNOW who we need to call. Neighbors should not be confused because a neighborhood or township is split down the middle and has two different state or U.S. legislators. I recall on several occasions contacting my state representative and being told by office staff that I was calling the wrong person. No, I wasn't calling the wrong representative, however, my representative's office was confused about their own district because of the convoluted district lines.

I urge the Ohio Redistricting Commission to be transparent and diligent in carrying out the will of over 70% of the voters of Ohio. Follow not just the letter of the constitutional amendments of 2015 and 2018, but the spirit in which the people of Ohio voted. Allow bipartisan and voter input on the 2021

district maps and ensure that citizens have ample opportunity to comment on splits that are made. Be proactive and shed light on the map drawing process every step of the way, ensuring that Ohio voters feel confident that maps are being drawn in the best interest of our communities. Give Ohio voters the fair districts they deserve and let Ohio voters choose their politicians. Thank you for the opportunity to share my perspective on the redistricting process and Medina County, Ohio. I look forward to commenting on proposed districts maps when they become available.

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen D. Welch