

Thank you for allowing me to submit my testimony to the Ohio Redistricting Commission. My name is Mark Erhardt and I am a retired Senior Vice President from a large bank headquartered in Ohio. I live in the Columbia Tusculum neighborhood in the City of Cincinnati.

I became aware of how legislative districts were drawn in my area during frequent bicycle rides I take through the city of Cincinnati. Cincinnati is blessed with an excellent system of dedicated bike lanes, bike paths and wide streets. As I would ride my bike through my neighborhood and adjacent neighborhoods during election times, I would notice campaign yard signs for competing candidates along one of my regular routes. Soon, I would come across a new set of campaign yard signs for a completely different set of competing candidates. Not much further along on my journey, I would start seeing signs again for the first competing set of candidates. And so on. Curious, I went online and looked up the Ohio House, Ohio Senate and US Congressional district maps for my part of Cincinnati. I guess I knew on some level that there was gerrymandering of districts in Ohio, but I was frankly shocked and dismayed to see how much my local community - a relatively small area that one can take a leisurely bike ride through - was divided. In particular, my immediate neighborhood, which is urban, is included with Ohio House and Senate districts that are largely suburban and rural in composition. My United States Congressional district stretches from my urban neighborhood for almost 100 miles to the east across beautiful, but very rural parts of the state.

My wife and I enjoy living in the city of Cincinnati. Our part of the city is a series of inter-connected communities that have a great combination of amenities: local parks along the hilltops, clusters of local small business, bars and restaurants, with easy access to downtown Cincinnati, but quieter and less congested than the urban core. Our part of the city has a mix of mostly single-family homes - many historic, some brand new and upscale, most are modest and well maintained. Although each community has its own name and center of gravity - Hyde Park, Mount Lookout, Columbia - Tusculum, Oakley, Linwood (among others), the lines between them are not distinct and most people wouldn't necessarily agree where one neighborhood starts and the next begins. In the mind of most locals, they are all good places and part of their local community. Your favorite restaurant might be in Mount Lookout, your favorite park in Columbia Tusculum, the farmers market you go to on Sunday mornings in Hyde Park.

These communities have many shared interests in keeping them strong and desirable to live in. Maintaining good public services suitable for an urban community - community policing, ample sidewalks, adequate parking along roads - are a priority. Reducing gun violence is important. Public transportation options are valued and it is worth making substantial investments in urban parks and bike trails. These would not necessarily be the same priorities for many of our co-constituents in the suburban and rural areas of our legislative districts where new road construction, agricultural policy issues, broadband access and hunting rights would be more top of mind.

My ask is that the Ohio Redistricting Commission follow both the letter and the spirit of the citizen-passed redistricting reforms passed in 2015 and 2018 to create districts that are compact, that keep communities, towns, and cities intact, that don't split neighborhoods and take into account citizen input from individuals such as myself. Thank you for taking my testimony.