

Proposed testimony before the Redistricting Commission Aug. 24, 2021

Honored Panelists and Legislators,

Thank you for allowing our community this opportunity to weigh in on what I believe is one of the most vital components or pernicious obstacles to fair elections and perhaps democracy-the power to redistrict, or in its worst form-gerrymandering. Since all of us only have this window constitutionally every 10 years, you bear a great responsibility to do the right and equitable thing for the communities that you represent.

My fascination with redistricting began in the mid 1970's. I graduated from Marietta College in 1970 and felt the need to involve myself in politics. During that time period I aligned myself politically with whatever party opposed the Vietnam War. But I was equally interested in how redistricting had become a tool to guarantee incumbency rather than insure fair elections for the electorate. Because in that era the leadership of the state often varied between Democrats and Republicans, it became clear to me that whichever party was in control, they would use redistricting as a device to stay there. I thought it undemocratic then I believe fervently that nothing has changed. Instead it has gotten worse. Not because of who is in charge now, but rather the technology has enabled those in office to become more precise and if you will, extreme in their map drawing.

At some point, the party in control of the process is going to have to make the choice to abandon the politics of the moment and look to the future. For the Republicans in charge now, I understand it will be more difficult for you to advocate for fairness and equity down the road because you are in charge now. My party, the Democratic party, did not do so when they had the opportunity. Down the road, things will change, as they always do in our state and they will be in control again. For the 70% of the people and the majority of voters in every single county in the state who voted to improve the redistricting process in 2015 and 2018, we don't care who does it, we just want it done.

From my perspective, a fair process would be taken out of your hands almost completely. The drawing of districts should be party-neutral. We know it is best to keep communities and counties within the same voting district. We know it is wrong for me to be in one state district and my neighbor across the street is in another. We know it is possible to measure the compactness of a district, as compared with the elongated versions we see along Lake Erie or in Southeastern Ohio. We know a process can be set up which can select the best of submissions from residents of the state.

Currently, 21 U.S. States have some form of non-partisan or bipartisan redistricting commission. Of these, 13 use these commissions to draw district boundaries. I would even venture to say that bipartisanship in this process should not be the goal. The goal is a fair and equitable process for voters.

I hope that should all of you decide that it is time to make the Great State of Ohio a beacon of fair elections for the nation, that your bravery will be rewarded for generations to come. Every citizen in this state will owe you a debt of gratitude for your profile in courage.

Respectfully submitted,

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