

## Ohio Redistricting Commission - 8-23-2021 - Cleveland .mp4

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [00:00:01] Again, I am State Senator Vernon Sykes from the Akron area and co-chair of this commission. We'd like to thank you all for being here today, really appreciate your input and need your input for better and fair districts. At this time, I'd like to also thank Cleveland State University for hosting this here and like to invite Dean Roland Anglin with the Levin Urban College to do a welcome.

**Anglin** [00:00:40] Good morning. I don't want my back to the commission. Good morning. My name is Roland Anglin and I'm the Dean of the Maxine Goodman Levin College of Urban Affairs here at Cleveland State.

**Audience** [00:00:56] We can't hear you.

**Anglin** [00:00:56] I am Roland Anglin. I'm the Dean of the Maxine Goodman Levin College of Urban Affairs here at Cleveland State. On behalf of Cleveland State, I want to welcome you to our campus. The work in which you engage is critical to our region and State's vibrancy. It is complicated work, and we wish you all the best in your deliberations today. Thanks again for choosing Cleveland State to host for, to come to our campus. This is an important meeting and we strive to be of service to the region and the state. Again, welcome and good luck.

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [00:01:35] Thank you, Dean, and thank the University. At this time, we would like to call this regional hearing to order. As people arrive who would like to testify, we ask you to fill out a witness slip on the table provided by the staff. Will the staff please call the roll?

**Staff** [00:02:04] Yes sir. Can you all hear me? Yes. Co-Chair Vernon Sykes?

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [00:02:09] Present.

**Staff** [00:02:10] Auditor Keith Faber?

**Auditor of State Keith Faber** [00:02:11] Yes.

**Staff** [00:02:11] Leader Emilia Sykes?

**State Representative Emilia Sykes** [00:02:15] Here.

**Staff** [00:02:15] Senator Theresa Gavarone, designee for President Huffman. Representative Scott Oelslager?

**State Representative Scott Oelslager** [00:02:24] Here.

**Staff** [00:02:24] Designee for Speaker Cupp. Merle Madrid?

**Merle Madrid, SOS Designee** [00:02:27] Present.

**Staff** [00:02:28] Designee for Secretary LaRose. Matthew Donahue, designee of Governor Mike DeWine. That's the end of the roll.

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [00:02:41] Thank you for the roll. In November 2015, Ohio voters approved a constitutional amendment which implemented a new General Assembly redistricting process and established the Ohio Redistricting Commission. The commission consists of the Governor, the State Auditor, the Secretary of State and one commissioner appointed by each of the legislative leaders of the two largest political parties in the Ohio House and the Ohio Senate. Four in total, one from each of the caucuses. The commission has until September 1st to pass a plan with the votes of at least two members affiliated with each major party. If it fails, the commission has until September 15th to pass a plan by a majority vote, four members. Maps that are passed with votes of two members affiliated with each major party are valid for 10 years, and maps passed by a simple majority vote are valid for two years, two general elections, a four year period. District requirements. Ohio legislative reapportionment process, as in all states, occurs in years ending in one, which are also the years in which the federal census figures are released by the United States Department of Commerce. The census figures released this year indicate that Ohio has a population of 11,799,448 people, a two point three percent growth from 2010. Under Article 11 of the Constitution, each of the ninety nine House districts should contain 119,186 people, and each of the thirty three Senate districts should contain 357,559 people, with a five percent deviation up or down. Anyone who has researched or undertaken the drawing of legislative districts knows that this process involves from far more than putting roughly the same number of people in each district. Article 11 contains specific rules governing the construction of these districts, including several layers of sometimes complex requirements, including district population requirements, rules on how to prioritize the splitting of political subdivisions, and additional district standards regarding favoring or disfavoring political parties and compactness of districts. The board must comply with the Ohio Constitution in addition to all applicable federal laws, including the Voter Rights Act. Because these hearings are being held for the purpose of receiving your input in this process, we're not going to go over the rules and in detail of the law. However, we encourage you to visit the commission's website at [www.redistricting.ohio.gov](http://www.redistricting.ohio.gov), which provides additional information on the redistricting process under Article 11. The purpose of today's hearing is to gather information, comments and input regarding the upcoming reconfiguration of the House and Senate district lines. Under a new congressional redistricting process adopted by voters in 2018, the Ohio legislature has the first opportunity to draw congressional lines with enactment of a bill signed by the governor. If it cannot, only then will the process fall to the Ohio Redistricting Commission. Therefore, we ask all witnesses to limit comments on testimony to the most immediate task of the Ohio Redistricting Commission, the adoption of Ohio House and Ohio Senate districts. Today, we are here to listen to you. We're not here to debate you or one another. We're here to get input from Ohioans on the state legislative redistricting process and how it impacts your communities, your representation in the Ohio General Assembly. Today, we have a limited time, amount of time for the hearing, and we want to give everyone an opportunity to give input in this process. We've scheduled here for three hours and we're going to ask witnesses to limit their testimony to initially to four minutes, to give time so that we can hear from everyone. A few other items before we begin, the proceedings will be recorded by the Ohio channel so the board and its deliberations may consider these things and all of these comments that are made today. So we ask you to speak clearly, loudly enough for the panel and the audience to hear, just like we have to do that today, make sure you do that as well. The commission also is accepting written testimony. You can submit that if you like online or you can give it to us if you have it here today. Any questions of the commission members? We'd like to call up our first witness today, Catherine LaCroix. She's coming.

**LaCroix** [00:09:02] Good morning and thank you for that slight pause. Due to the full room, I was way in the back, so I had to scurry up here and recover my breath. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I'm Catherine LaCroix. I'm the co-president of the League of Women Voters of Greater Cleveland, a 100 year old, all volunteer, nonpartisan organization dedicated to the importance of the vote. We are part of the State and National Leagues of Women Voters, which have been fighting for redistricting reform since the 1970s. In Ohio, our first ballot initiative attempt was in 1981. Throughout this time, through multiple phases of Ohio's political life, we have sent the same message. Legislative districts must be drawn in a way that represents communities and does not unduly favor one political party over another. I personally was heavily involved in coordinating our league's petition drive for congressional redistricting reform in 2017. The outpouring of grassroots support for that petition drive was overwhelming. Over 700 enthusiastic and dedicated volunteers worked with our Greater Cleveland League. It was the largest group effort we have ever seen. The same army of activists has remained interested, involved and as you can see from the packed room today, in spite of a pandemic, we are eager for successful reform. Our Greater Cleveland League has been- our greater Cleveland area, has been particularly hard hit by gerrymandering in both its state legislative districts and its congressional districts. So I speak to you both as members of the Redistricting Commission and, for four of you, as members of the Ohio General Assembly, for you will be the leaders in drawing both types of maps. In the interests of time and in the awareness that many people will speak after me, I will not detail the facts all too familiar to all of us concerning the current district lines in our area. My major point to start off this hearing is that the decision makers in Columbus owe the voters faithful adherence to the intention of the reforms. 75 percent of Ohio voters spoke in that 2018, 70 percent in 2015, draw lines in a way that respects our communities and is not politically biased. When drawing lines for the State General Assembly, it is particularly important to respect the need for representational fairness and to draw districts that are compact and understandable to voters, not dividing neighbor from neighbor in separate districts. We at the League are hopeful that our elected representatives will rise to the challenge. We hope that the redistricting process will be transparent, respect public input, and overall and overwhelmingly serve the voters. Our League has been working on this issue for 50 years. We will be doing everything we can as part of the Fair Districts Coalition in the coming months to assure fair districts for Ohio voters. Thank you.

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [00:12:30] Ms. LaCroix, thank you for your comments. We certainly appreciate it. There any questions at this time? If not, thank you very much.

**LaCroix** [00:12:38] Thank you.

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [00:12:39] Next person will be Miss Lynn Lilly.

**Staff** [00:12:47] And chair before Miss Lynn comes up, in the interest of time, we'll be holding testimonies to four minutes. Thank you. Four minutes.

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [00:13:14] She doesn't seem to be here. We'll move to Ms. Pamela Mascio. Ms. Pamela Mascio.

**Mascio** [00:13:32] Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you. My name is Pamela Mascio. I live in Aurora, in the 76th House District represented by Diane Grendell, and the 18th Senate District represented by Jerry Cirino. I'm speaking here today to tell you why I believe it is critical to our democracy to restore representational government by drawing fair maps for the next ten years. I've previously been involved in

state issues. I was the president of the Northeast Ohio affiliate of Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation from 2001 until 2007. During that time, I initiated a bill in partnership with Senator Kirk Schuring, to provide additional state funding for the Breast and Cervical Cancer Program. After two years of work, the bill passed with bipartisan support and was signed into law by Governor Kasich. I was honored to attend the signing ceremony with both Democratic and Republican representatives. I'm not sure I could accomplish that same feat today. Our legislature has grown more deeply divided and seems to be concentrated on fringe cultural issues that only a minority of Ohioans would think important. I believe we have arrived at this point almost entirely because of partisan gerrymandering, which continues to become more and more sophisticated as technology advances. The voters no longer have a voice. I have called Representative Grendell's office over 20 times in the past year. I keep track of all the calls I make. I have never once reached her or an aide. I only get a voicemail. I leave my message and when appropriate, I ask for a callback. I have never received one. In all the inquiries I have made, I have only once received a form letter back from her which did not address the questions I raised. I know Representative Grendell does not have to answer my calls or respond to me because she will undoubtedly be reelected. I ask you, should I continue to call and try to interact with her? I believe I'm wasting my time and I'm beginning to feel foolish. I'm personally experiencing the disenfranchisement caused by gerrymandering in our state. I'm also a speaker for fair districts and over the past six months I have spoken to all kinds of groups on redistricting. Just last week I spoke to the Rotary in Aurora, a largely Republican group. In every talk I've given, someone inevitably asks, "Is gerrymandering legal? How can this be?" To our collective detriment, it is. But please do not ignore the powerful and unprecedented vote by Ohioans, in 2015 and 2018, demanding fair maps, not skewed to one party or another, just fair. And we want ten year maps. Not four year maps, but ten year bipartisan maps. Please do this work in accordance and most importantly, in the true spirit of the reforms that Ohioans overwhelmingly passed. Thank you for listening to me today. [Applause]

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [00:16:53] Thank you, Miss Mascio. Are there any questions? Thanks a lot. Next witness will be Ms. Linda New.

**New** [00:17:11] Thank you for this opportunity to speak about this crucial issue of redistricting in Ohio. My name is Linda New. I vote in Ohio House District 7, Ohio Senate District 24 and the 18th Congressional District in Olmstead Falls. I would like to draw your attention to the issue of unfair representation in my neighborhood and in neighborhoods across the state. The Pew Research Center indicates that 42 percent of voting Ohioans lean toward policies held by Republicans, 40 percent lean toward policies held by Democrats, and 18 percent have no party affiliation. To ensure fair representation in the Ohio General Assembly, we should see near equal numbers of Democrats and Republicans in our legislature. Instead, our Ohio House is 35 percent Democrat, 65 percent Republican, and our House Senate consists of 24 percent Democrats and 76 percent Republicans. These inaccurate numbers were finagled through unchecked gerrymandering in Ohio. When district lines are drawn with such disregard for communities, cities, counties, indigenous groups and the concern - the concerns of half of America - of Ohio constituents are not represented by the legislature who should be working for us. Because of this misrepresentation in the General Assembly, decisions are being made with little regard to the health and safety of Ohio voters. We see countless examples of this miscarriage of legislative responsibility. Ohio House Bill 6 was steamrolled through the legislature using bribery and coercion with almost no voter support, leaving Ohio with polluting coal mines and outdated nuclear power plants. Right now, 80 percent of Ohioans do not support a House Bill 6. Our opportunity to build a

thriving wind energy sector is being wasted in favor of leaking methane, injection wells, hydraulic fracturing of our shale beds, and dangerous cracker plants in low income areas. All in defiance of proven research demonstrating the urgent need for a just transition to sustainable energy sources. Even now, bills are being discussed that will allow huge amounts of radioactive fracking waste to be spread on our roads in defiance of ODNR testing results, all for the benefit of a company that looks to profit from the sale. If the people of Ohio were fairly represented in the General Assembly, addressing these problems of environmental injustice would be the highest priority in our legislature. Instead, the health of our community - of our communities is being threatened by legislators who are not, will not be held accountable for their actions due to gerrymandered districts in Ohio. I want to live in a state where every voice counts. And I ask you now to correct this unjust disregard of Ohio's interests. Redistricting must be done transparently, with community input, resulting in an accurate representation of Ohio voters. We all want safe, healthy, thriving communities in our beautiful state. Thank you for your time and consideration of my request. [Applause.]

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [00:20:42] At this time we want to take a brief five minute break. They want to open up this wall for more space. [Applause.].

**Recess** [00:20:56] [Recess].

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [00:20:56] At this time, we've had two additional commission members to join us. Would they introduce themselves please, briefly.

**State Senator Theresa Gavarone** [00:21:05] I am State Senator Theresa Gavarone. I live in Bowling Green and represent the 2nd Senate District, and I'm here on behalf of President Matt Huffman.

**Audience** [00:21:17] Can't hear.

**State Senator Theresa Gavarone** [00:21:20] Is my mic not on?

**Audience.** [00:21:21] [Indecipherable]

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [00:21:21] Hold the mic close to your face.

**State Senator Theresa Gavarone** [00:21:21] Can you hear me now? I'm State Senator Theresa Gavarone. I live in Bowling Green and represent Ohio's 2nd Senate District, and I'm here as a designee on behalf of Senate President Matt Huffman.

**Matthew Donahue, Governor Designee** [00:21:36] I'm chief legal counsel-.

**Audience** [00:21:38] Can't hear.

**Matthew Donahue, Governor Designee** [00:21:38] I'm as close as I can get.

**Audience** [00:21:46] [Indecipherable].

**Matthew Donahue, Governor Designee** [00:21:46] My name is Matthew Donahue. I'm the chief legal counsel for Governor Devine and I am his designee today.

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [00:21:52] We also have several state legislators here in the room. We certainly appreciate their attendance. They play a very, very vital role in this whole fairness scheme. Will the state legislators please stand. [Applause] At this time, we will continue, with Brian Glassman.

**Glassman** [00:22:33] Senator Sykes as co-chair, designee for Representative Cupp as co-chair, and to all members of the commission, my name is Brian Glassman. I am a professor emeritus at the Cleveland Marshall College of Law, just down the street. Among other courses, I teach election law. I've also presented and written on the subject. I'm testifying not as a Republican or as a Democrat, but as a voter. Simply put, a robust representative democracy depends on greater voter participation. As I tell my students, I don't care how you vote. I care that you vote. Logic dictates that if voters believe their votes don't count, because of gerrymandering or other similar practices, they are less likely to participate. At that point, all members of our representative democracy lose. There will be less buy-in by voters to the results of elections because they didn't help select the winner. And voters will be deprived of better candidates with better ideas. Although gerrymandering has existed for well over 200 years, Elbridge Gerry, after whom the practice was named, was one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. Our nation's founders could not possibly have imagined how modern technology would allow voting maps to be drawn with such surgical precision. To the detriment of our representative democracy, we have arrived at a point where our legislators choose their voters rather than the other way around. Gerrymandering by packing and cracking voters moves us farther away from the core principle that every vote should count equally. Certain redistricting criteria, compactness, contiguity, communities of interest, are grounded in common sense. Another protection of minority groups is based on our highest ideals and mandated by federal law. But locking in partisan advantage or ensuring the reelection of incumbents? Such criteria damage our representative democracy because they effectively block better candidates and better ideas. The 2020 elections saw a surge in voter participation, up to a participation rate of approximately 66 percent, according to the Pew Research Center, in part due to many highly competitive races at all levels of government. Still, as reported by the Pew Research Center, U.S. voter participation rates lag far behind. We are 30th out of 35 countries. These are other industrialized democracies. Political races not hampered by gerrymandered districts will be more competitive and will produce greater voter participation. I urge the Ohio Redistricting Commission to seize this historic opportunity to draw voting districts that are free of gerrymandering and thus give better candidates and better ideas a chance to flourish. Our democracy deserves no less. As I conclude a question for the commission, will you release to the public copies of any proposed plan at least seven days before you adopt it? And will you allow- [Applause] And will you allow at least one day between each of the final three public hearings mandated by Ohio Constitution Article 11.01C? Thank you for this opportunity to present. [Applause]

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [00:26:44] Thank you, Professor. Are there any questions? Seeing none, thank you very much. Peter Petto.

**Petto** [00:27:02] Thank you for the opportunity to speak. I'm here because I believe that a careful, open, nonpartisan and transparent redistricting process is important to Ohio's future. I am a recently retired high school mathematics and statistics teacher, and I have helped many students learn quantitative literacy, including topics such as voting power, fair division and apportionment, things you are wrestling with today and in the weeks ahead. A lot of my students found these subjects fascinating, but were aghast when they looked at Ohio's heavily gerrymandered maps. These maps have been a gruesome tattoo on our

body politic over the last ten years. So many gnarly districts illustrate oh so clearly the appearance of impropriety. The current maps are evidence that those people who were closest to lawmaking in 2011, those legislators, bent our laws to their own advantage. I imagine I will not be the only person to remind you that over 70 percent of Ohioans, and a majority in every one of our 88 counties, want a fair districting process. Unfortunately, this round of redistricting has already started out badly. I'm not talking about the delay in receiving the U.S. Census data. I'm talking about the delay in starting these hearings and the haste with which they have been announced and are being conducted. Because we citizens- [Applause] Because we citizens have not had sufficient time, for the most part, to process the census data, these hearings are premature for the presentation of completed state maps. So nearly everything you'll hear today, you could have heard weeks or months ago. I'm certain you were asked to begin these hearings before right now. And right now is when I would certainly prefer to be finishing a map that I could propose for your consideration. I can say one or two things about my current districts that I hope will be helpful to you as you construct my upcoming districts. I live in Bay Village, about 17 miles west of here. Members of the Bay Village community constructed a map detailing our community of interest that will be submitted to you separately. My first ask is, please don't break up the Bay Village in West Shore community we've defined. That includes our town, Rocky River, West Lake, Fairview Park, and North Olmsted. Our current state House District is well drawn; it is exactly our community of interest. Our current state Rep is Democrat, the previous one was Republican. Our state Reps have been highly responsive and attentive to their constituents, both D and R. But our state's Senate District, number 24, is poorly drawn. Perhaps you know it. It's non compact, it's on the verge of being noncontiguous, saved by a sliver of Euclid in our Lake Erie border. It certainly looks very fishy to anyone who glances at it, that having both the western and eastern borders of Cuyahoga County is the edges of a senator's district that does not include most of the in between is a little crazy. We need a better state Senate District. Now, I heard that you might not handle congressional districts, although maybe you will. In any case, Bay Villages' District along Lake Erie is taught across our nation as a classic example of partisan gerrymandering. We need a better one there too. So please make sure our new maps are constructed of districts that are compact, and do not draw them so that they favor or disfavor a political party. Make sure that we get to see each and every iteration of the maps as you draw them and give us the opportunity to critique those maps and suggest better ones to you before they are finalized. Please follow not just the rules and the case law. Go further. Follow the spirit of the law, please. Make us proud to be from Ohio. Thank you for your attention. [Applause]

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [00:31:09] Are there any questions for Mr. Petto? To Mr. Petto and Mr. Glassman, Professor, I would like to ask you all at some point to maybe submit some comments about representational fairness, how you think that should be calculated. That would be good from your perspective, from a scholarly perspective. Certainly we appreciate that. At this time we'd like to call up Ms. Elizabeth Rader.

**Rader** [00:31:50] Good morning. My name is Elizabeth Rader, I go by Betsy Rader, and I live in Russell Township in Geauga County. I am testifying as a lifelong Ohio citizen, a voter and a former Democratic candidate who has recently run for office for United States Congress and Ohio's 14th District and for Ohio State Senate District 18. I regret that I cannot comment today on actual proposed maps, as Ohio's citizens intended when they pass the new redistricting laws. However, I will tell you this. The districts in which I vote and ran are both grossly gerrymandered. For instance, Ohio's 18th state Senate District carves up Lake and Geauga counties in a convoluted fashion to remove from the districts cities like Painsville, Chardon, and much of Mentor, excising the precincts with more

Democratic voters in order to make the district as unfair as possible. The current boundaries of state Senate District 18 makes sense only when the point is to create a sure winner for the Republican Party. I won't say much about Ohio's 14th Congressional District, I know you're saving that for another day, but suffice it to state that in that district two counties are split among four districts, Cuyahoga and Summit, and one is split among three districts, Portage County. Extracting the Democrats, packing the Republicans, into a district where it would be politically competitive if it were fairly drawn. Gerrymandering in northeast Ohio is creating an unhealthy one party system where sometimes only one party is even represented on the ballot in the general election, giving voters no choice at all. Unfairly drawn districts leading to routine twenty and thirty point victory margins discourage both candidates and voters from even participating in the democratic process. Unfairly gerrymandered districts lead to extremist candidates in party primaries, who need only appeal to the party's base before sailing through the general election. And once those candidates are in office, they are often unresponsive, as you heard earlier today. They're unresponsive because they are so confident of reelection. For instance, my Republican state representative, Diane Grendell, did not even bother to vote on the removal of Larry Householder, an incredibly important issue to voters in this state. Running for office, I regularly met voters who did not know what district they lived in because even the street where they lived was divided among different districts. I met voters who did not know who represents them because their Representatives felt no need to reach out to voters. I met voters who were reluctant to get involved in a political campaign by volunteering because they were justifiably hopeless that their efforts could make a difference. I found it difficult to raise the money to run competitive races because potential donors could see how severely gerrymandered my districts were and were rightfully skeptical that even an excellent candidate could win. This compounds the unfairness of gerrymandering by adding extremely unbalanced financial resources to the mix in many campaigns. Competitive districts are good for everyone, no matter what their political persuasion. A one party system where voters have no choice is what we see in corrupt and autocratic countries, with unaccountable leaders. Discouraging voters and candidates by presenting them with an unfair, undemocratic election system is destroying our democracy and our great state of Ohio, pushing our politics to the extremes at a time when we desperately need to be able to work together on life and death matters. I ask this commission to please listen to the clear will of Ohio's voters and create fair districts. Support democracy. [Applause].

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [00:35:50] Are there any questions of the members? Thank you very much, Ms. Rader, appreciate it. Ms. Kim Robinson. Kim Robinson. We'll move then to Laura Rushton. Excuse me if I'm mispronouncing that.

**Rushton** [00:36:34] Good Morning. Thank you for this chance to speak. My name is Laura Rushton. I'm here to talk to you today about why it's so important to me that this commission and the legislature honor our call for a transparent and bipartisan approach to redistricting. I'm a former teacher who used to take my fourth grade classes to the state house every year to meet their Representatives and tour the Statehouse, that magnificent building where laws are passed that could could affect their lives. I lived in Richland County then, in Mansfield, where I taught fourth grade in a private school for seven years, and then moved to a public school in Shelby to teach third grade. I made sure my students understood how the government worked, how laws are made and changed, and what it meant to be an actively engaged citizen of our democracy. These are essential values to me. Now I live in Cleveland, where I tutor adults preparing to become U.S. citizens, and I am active in the League of Women Voters and other civic organizations. I have helped in campaigns, served as a poll worker and voted in almost every election since I was old enough to vote. After my family and my church, nothing is more sacred to me than the



right to participate in our democracy. While I was teaching during the 1990s and 2000s, I knew who my Representatives were and took it for granted that my city was in one district where my member of Congress and State Representatives knew the area and at least occasionally mingled with the people they represented, at our county fair, town halls, and other events. After 2010, that changed dramatically. My congressional district stretched across seven counties and our mid-sized city of Mansfield was split between two districts. The 12th may not have been the most gerrymandered district in the state, but it struck me as completely illogical that a very small slice of Richland County was carved out to be a part of a district that ran all the way to Zanesville in the southern half of Muskingum County. For some odd reason, it also included the Columbus neighborhood of Clintonville. After seeing the district map, it was no surprise to find out that it had been created in secret by one party, with no input from the other, just to make it harder for minority candidates to win elections. Gerrymandering hurts our state by splitting up counties and communities. In Mansfield, I was in a different congressional district from friends who live no more than a mile away. My representative's office was an hour's drive to Columbus, and he failed to respond when constituents called for a town hall about the proposed repeal the Affordable Care Act. We had to have a town hall without our congressman, who apparently didn't find it necessary to listen to our concerns. Gerrymandered districts create safe seats for incumbents so they don't have to work to win the votes of all the people they represent. It has resulted in sharper partisan divisions and a deep sense of futility, and it allows more extreme views to dominate in the legislature while long term problems remain unsolved. I understand that this commission's primary job is to create legislative districts for the Ohio General Assembly, so I would also like to say that I've been in touch with my Representatives in the Ohio House and Senate on various issues. They will listen to my concerns, but over the past decade, it has been increasingly clear that their party leaders influence the bills they support or oppose, regardless of the issues I raise. This was especially true with a House Bill 6, which both my Representative and Senator voted for in spite of my objections. I live in Strongsville now, which is in the 7th House District and the 24th Senate District. I attempted to draw a map of my Senate district, which has a funny horseshoe shape. It includes only the outermost suburbs of Cleveland, so my Senator is all the way out in Chagrin Falls on the Far East Side, an hour's drive from where I live. The east and west sides of Cleveland have very different perspectives and problems, which our Senate district, as it's currently drawn, does not reflect. Now that Ohio voters have spoken, twice, by a clear majority in all 88 counties, it is time to redraw the maps with concrete, compact districts that make sense. The constitutional amendments passed in 2015 and 2018 call for public hearings and transparency. We, the people, have been ignored for too long. When the new maps are drawn, all we ask is that you listen to your voters, follow the guidelines laid out in these amendments and work toward bipartisan consensus. Listen to experts and voting advocates. Pass the Public Submissions bill, so there is a timely process for submitting sample maps. This is your opportunity to restore the people's faith in our system of government. Thank you for taking the time to listen to my testimony.

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [00:41:37] Thank you very much. [Applause] Any questions? Mr. Tim Clarke, Tim Clarke.

**Clarke** [00:42:02] Good morning, panel. My name is Tim Clarke. 10 years ago, I submitted a plan to this board's predecessor and the first thing I want to say is that is my intention to submit a plan to the to this panel. Unfortunately, data's only been out for 10 days, so I haven't actually gotten around to finishing it, but I intend to submit something. The other thing I would state is that there is a statement on the website about how to submit a map. But the procedure, I think is a little bit unclear. It says submit a zip file, but it doesn't say

exactly what should be in the zip file. So it would be helpful if that could be clarified. Thank you. Anyway, one of the things that I said when I submitted the plan 10 years ago was how important it was that the districts should reflect the will of the people of the state. If a majority of the voters vote for a party to govern the state of Ohio, that party should be given the opportunity to govern the state of Ohio. Elections, elections matter, elections should matter, but only if those results actually reflect the will of the people. And the districts that we have had for the last 10 years basically stated that it didn't really matter how many people voted for Democrats, Republicans were around the state of Ohio. Since then, of course, the rules have changed, and while there's been a lot of different changes, a lot of - not least of which is the membership of this panel - in my opinion, the most important change is that there is a mandate, a constitutional mandate, that districts should reflect the political balance of the state. I hope that this panel takes that mandate seriously because it goes to the heart of our representative democracy. Hopefully, I'll be able to give you, hope we'll [?] be able to discuss some more concrete suggestions when I have a proposal to submit, but for now, I'm going to leave it at that. And I thank this panel for their attention.

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [00:44:16] Thank you, Mr. Clarke. [Applause] And we will also look at the website to see if it can be clarified.

**Clarke** [00:44:22] OK, thank you.

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [00:44:23] Thank you. Mr. Stephen Kellat.

**Kellat** [00:44:50] Good morning. My name is Stephen Michael Kellat. I live in Ashtabula, Ohio. For the interests of disclosure, I am the Republican candidate for the Ward 4th seat on Ashtabula City Council this November. Otherwise, good morning, thank you for the opportunity to address you today. The redistricting process will help determine our state's fate for much of the next decade, which makes providing input this morning rather important. Ashtabula County is the largest county in our great state by land area. Located on Lake Erie southern shore, it has land area that gives it an area roughly half that of the state of Rhode Island. Ashtabula County has a population density far, far lower than many of the other counties of our state, though. Currently, Ashtabula County is split in two districts for the Ohio House. The majority of the county is part of the 99th District, which is represented by Sarah Fowler Arthur of Geneva-on-the-Lake. A small part of the southern reaches of the county, focused on the United States route 322 corridor, is part of the 64th District, represented by Michael J. O'Brien of Warren. Currently, I live in the 99th District. Our district is subject to a bit of a socio, pardon me, socioeconomic mismatch. Ashtabula County is comparatively far poorer than the communities in Geauga County that are additionally included in the 99th District at present. Chardon is greatly mismatched in terms socioeconomically compared to most communities in the Ashtabula County portion of the 99th District. This creates a difficulty for the people of the district in that any Representative would have a rather difficult time balancing the diversity of interests of an unbalanced district. Data from the 2020 census shows that the racial and ethnic composition of Ashtabula County is similar to Lake and Geauga Counties. The data also shows, however, that socioeconomically Ashtabula County has far more in common with Trumbull and Mahoning Counties than it does with Lake and Geauga. It is rather disturbing that there is a higher percentage of people in poverty, as well as a higher percentage of people with disabilities under the age of 65, in Ashtabula County compared to Lake, Geauga, Mahoning and Trumbull Counties. I strongly urge that you please consider realigning the 99th District's boundaries so that they do not include any of Geauga County. Inclusion of all of Ashtabula County's population as well, pardon me, as well as part of

Trumbull County's population, would create a district that would be more, pardon, more coherent socioeconomically. The federal government already considers interests to align in that direction, as Ashtabula, Trumbull and Mahoning Counties are part of the East Gate Regional Council of Government Transportation planning group, while Geauga is part of the Northeast Ohio area wide coordinating agency Transport Planning Group. Federal government doesn't even consider it part of northeast Ohio. In too many ways, the definition of northeast Ohio used by outlets like The Plain Dealer as well as Cleveland area broadcast media, does not include Ashtabula County. They do include Geauga County in their definition of northeast Ohio, even at the Plain Dealer, and house staff cover stories there. Even though the Nielsen Company includes Ashtabula County in its Cleveland designated market area, the odd thing is that none of those television stations can actually be picked up readily with the consumer grade antenna in Ashtabula County. If you put rabbit ears on your TV in Ashtabula, good luck. WEWS, News Channel 5, you're not going to see it out there. Even though the district lines are drawn to try to include Ashtabula County in the Greater Cleveland sphere of influence, I will be brief, many areas of daily life show that it is not properly part of the party at all. Geography, social factors, economic factors and even culture show that Ashtabula County is increasingly a community that should not be included in districts that include areas from Lake or Geauga, as that is just a grouping of very unlike things. A more natural fit would be to align it more directly with Trumbull to the South for its Ohio House district, and if that decision passes to this commission, also for its US House district. Thank you very much for your time consideration today.

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [00:49:28] Thank you very much, appreciate it. [Applause] Ms. Hannah Servedio. Servedio.

**Servedio** [00:49:50] Hello! Members of the Ohio Redistricting Commission, thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify today in support of Ohio's redistricting process and in the hope that fairly drawn maps are the result of these community hearings. My name is Hannah Servedio. I am a Cleveland resident, House District 10 and Senate District 21, and I am proud to serve as the senior organizer with NARAL Pro-Choice Ohio. As such, I'm going to speak about an issue that I care deeply about, one that is undeniably affected by our current map system: access to abortion care. I spend a lot of my time traveling and talking with community members, not only about what's happening statewide as it relates to reproductive health and rights, but also why some of it has come to be. As a result of that gerrymandered districts, there are a disproportionate amount of anti-choice legislators in the Ohio House and Senate. On average, more than six out of every 10 people in Ohio supports the Supreme Court ruling in Roe v. Wade, and yet our Statehouse is flooded with abortion ban after abortion ban. It's hard to keep up and I work in the field. My tax dollars, the ones that I happily pay, are going towards legislators battling it out on the House and Senate floor over experiences most of them have never had to deal with, not to mention specifically ignoring testimony heard that spoke to these experiences. Instead of solving actual issues in the state, like food insecurity, education funding and maternal and infant mortality. Even in the face of a deadly [Applause] Even in the face of a deadly public health crisis like COVID-19, abortion is still somehow the focus. Senate Bill 260, which prohibits physicians from using telemedicine options to prescribe abortion medication to patients, was passed and signed into law before being challenged, during a global pandemic, a time where telemedicine care became dire and heavily utilized in other fields of medicine. These bills and budget decisions are directly causing harm to our communities, especially communities of color. For too many, abortion is a right in name only. That's why we don't just talk about reproductive rights, it's important that that translates to reproductive access. The impacts of restrictions on or outright bans of

reproductive health care are felt the most by people already marginalized and oppressed by the structural inequities here in Ohio. And instead of addressing the needs of their constituents, anti-choice legislators have been following their own agendas every step of the way. Gerrymandering drives political extremism. We don't see the balance that communities would benefit from, and instead, the power is held by those who have the privilege to shout the loudest. Legislators get comfortable in these districts. They don't hold town halls. They straight up say that they don't address the calls or emails of people they don't agree with. They know that they continually push ideals that interests them and their big donors without feeling any real effect at the ballot box. It's predetermined, it's anti-democratic, and it's unfair. Voters should get the chance to choose their representatives, not the other way around. Regardless of this commission's personal beliefs on policy based issues in the state, I hope you'll take into consideration that fair maps, districts drawn with community input, represent Ohioans more equally and will be a benefit for all going forward. Thank you. [Applause]

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [00:53:02] Thank you very much.

**Servedio** [00:53:03] Thank you so much.

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [00:53:07] Gerald Barna.

**Barna** [00:53:19] Morning.

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [00:53:19] Good morning.

**Barna** [00:53:23] Senator Sykes and members of the panel. My name is Gerald Barna. I've been a resident in the city of Avon, Ohio, for 18 years and lived in Lorain County for over 50 years. I'm here to talk about the 57th District, House District, which is where Avon resides currently. There are many issues with House District 57, and I'd like to highlight some of those and propose a solution for addressing those issues. I don't know that I can do it, but I was working, you know, pictures are worth a thousand words, and so I drew up some maps yesterday, but I don't know if I can get them on your computer here. I'd like to try if that's possible.

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [00:54:20] I don't know. Do we have technical people here to- Apparently, he's his own technician. [Laughter] [Indecipherable] That would be great, that would be great.

**Barna** [00:55:15] I do have copies of my testimony that have been distributed. Both are online. Unfortunately the maps did not get [Indecipherable]

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [00:56:07] [Laughter] We do have a technician in route, so you could just continue until they get there.

**Barna** [00:56:12] Well, we'll do it, we'll do it without the without the map then the moment. I was a senior manager at NASA, Glenn Research Center and retired in 2003 after 40 years of service. After that, I consulted part time for small businesses and community organizations, nonprofit organizations. So this is the experience that I tried to bring into this presentation. Avon is essentially, the district, essentially, has a large body, and then it narrows down, moves northward, takes about a third of North Ridgeville, where I lived also, and then includes Avon, but does not include any of the surrounding communities, which are very similar to Avon, particularly Avon Lake. They're primarily residential, but

with a focus on industrial development. And this is not true of a great portion of District 57. There it is, that's not the one that's the before.

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [00:57:42] Yes. Mr. Barna, your time is running so we-

**Barna** [00:57:45] Well this is, let me just go, there it is. You can see where that District 57 goes. It snakes down cutoff Northridge. And there's Avon among all of the other communities. So what I'm proposing is on the next chart. It's a compact, with continuity, contiguity, that retains city and township borders in their entirety and has strong similarities. That's it in blue, yes. And you can see the change. And that's what I'm proposing that you consider as a as a district in your deliberations.

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [00:58:32] Thank you, Mr. Barna, we certainly appreciate it. It does look more compact. Thank you very much. [Applause] Benjamin Boardman. Benjamin Boardman. Mark Griffiths. Ralph Turek. Mary Walsh. Reginald Williams. Areege Hammad. Oh, excuse me.

**Williams** [01:00:03] I'm Reginald Williams.

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [01:00:03] Oh excuse me.

**Williams** [01:00:03] [Indecipherable].

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [01:00:03] Thank you, sir.

**Williams** [01:00:06] Thank you. I want to thank the entire commission for opening up this issue to the public. It's a it's a giant step and it's a baby step. And I do appreciate it. I'll tell you, there are many people before me and many people coming after me that are going to talk about the districts and the specifics and the nitty gritty. I'm not going to talk about stats and maps or anything like that. I want to get underneath that just a little bit. I live in Shaker Heights and in my home there are four votes; myself, my wife and I have two voting age daughters. It's really, it's really more like three votes, two very long arguments every election cycle, and then one vote. My youngest daughter is, whenever it's election time, she asks me questions like "Oh, dad, how do I know my vote's going to count? How do I know they're going to count it the right way and where it's going to count? How do I know they're not going to bundle my vote up and put it aside or something like that?" And, look, I'm just a dad. I grew up believing that voting matters and it's difficult to answer that. You see, underneath all these numbers, there really is a human aspect to it. I'm an attorney in private practice. I'm here, honestly, because I'm able to. There are many, many people that would be here, that want to be here, but they can't be here at nine o'clock in the morning, because somebody has to serve your morning muffins and coffee. Somebody has to be there when Wal-Mart opens. So when you look at all of these good people here and just know that all of them, all of us and although I'm standing here, I can really only speak for me, but all of us are here to represent their interests too. And the hope is that you all understand that their interest needs to be represented, even though they are not here, even though they may not have voted for you, even though they may not have voted. [Applause] Of course, many of these people are black and brown and, well, as you figure out how to make this redistricting process more transparent, just I ask that you really pay attention. You just make it your business to think about, to see the unseen, because it's not as though they don't understand or know the issues or know that there's something going on. They know. I mean, the conversation that I had every every election cycle with my daughter, many of us have. Here's the thing, redistricting is a moral issue, it is a moral

process. It transcends partizan politics, it transcends constituency maintenance. It transcends winning. It's the only way to get things done to help everybody, and when you're elected, you are elected to represent everybody. [Applause] The people that can't make it often are young, they have children. They're young voters, they have children that are going to grow up to become voters. And don't you want them to believe in the system? Don't you want them to believe that voting works? [Applause] I'm involved in school discipline and I've been involved in it for a good number of years and I see a great many students and their families and I deal with them, I've got to know them, I deal with them very closely. And the vast majority of students that get into serious trouble, I'm talking about expulsion or repeated suspensions, and this kind of thing, these are students that face all manner of difficulties unrelated to their actions, things that they can't control. I mean, the kinds of things that- It's remarkable, you would be amazed. I mean, things like food insecurity and mental health issues, COVID-19 and gun violence. And these are the issues that you're supposed to do something about. And I'm not trying to put you on point about that, but you know what you're supposed to do and you know, and you all are working out how are you going to do it. But the issue is that gerrymandering makes it impossible to get these kinds of, get the kind of solutions that are needed to help these folks done. And there's a human cost. And that cost is found in our hospitals, you find people dying in hospitals, young and old. You find people dying of starvation in their homes, you find kids dying in the street from guns. I mean, these are these are things that these are problems that can be addressed. I absolutely believe it. And, you know, I've always felt like, you know, down in Columbus, you know, some of the most creative thinkers are down there. Some of the political world's greatest thinkers and most creative thinkers are down there. Is just a matter of focusing and, focusing and being transparent and understanding that integrity means being more than a politician, being a statesman, you know. It means, it really means, the legacy of bringing in everybody. I thank you for taking time to listen to me, I really do. And I look forward to where this lands next. Have a great day. [Applause]

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [01:06:49] Thank you, Mr. Williams, for your perspective and also for reminding us what we are supposed to do. Thank you very much.

**Williams** [01:06:56] Thank you, Senator Sykes.

**Merle Madrid, SOS Designee** [01:06:59] Senator, if I may.

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [01:07:00] Yes.

**Merle Madrid, SOS Designee** [01:07:00] Just a follow up comment and question for Mr. Williams. Thank you, sir, for your time and testimony this morning. I'm Merle Madrid, I'm a designee for Secretary of State Frank LaRose. I just wanted to address the issue you raised about your daughter's questions about faith in our elections and will her vote be counted, because I think we live in a time right now where whether it's your daughter or a pillow maker or anyone in between, the questioning of our integrity of our elections is under attack. And that is the bedrock of our democracy. She can go down to the Cuyahoga County Board of Elections eight blocks from here and be a poll worker. I know a lot of people in this room have done that. I hope that all of you do. She can see the logic and accuracy testing that the machines go through prior to every election. She can see the post-election audit that's conducted every election. I say that not to call her out. She's representative of what so many people in this country right now are questioning. And that's the accuracy and the integrity of our elections [Indecipherable] and I can say for Ohio that that is as transparent a process as there is anywhere in this country, anywhere in this

world. So I encourage you to - right now, there's a mayoral election going on September 14th. It's the early voting season here in Cleveland and in Toledo. Whether it's a municipal election or an even numbered year gubernatorial or presidential election, please encourage her to participate. Her voice matters. Her vote will be fairly counted. Every Ohioan who chooses to participate will be fairly counted. Thank you for your time here this morning.

**Williams** [01:08:32] I appreciate that. I just want you to know I take her down there and I have for years. I take her down there and we have conversations with the good people working there and everything. It's a question, it's more a question of the spirit of the process. It's more a question of that. [Applause] I mean, no one's doubting that. And I'll leave it at that, but I appreciate what you're sharing and I will take it under advisement.

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [01:09:04] Again, thank you, Mr. Williams.

**Williams** [01:09:05] Yes.

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [01:09:08] Areege Hammad. Areege Hammad. Hammad.

**Hammad** [01:09:27] Good morning. Can everyone hear me? OK, what?

**Audience** [01:09:31] No, we cannot.

**Hammad** [01:09:33] Oh, sorry. My name is Areege Hammad. I'm speaking on behalf of the Ohio chapter of the Council on American Islamic Relations, known as CAIR Ohio. As a civil rights and advocacy organization for Ohio Muslims, we understand what the maps mean to our community. Muslims are often the subject of political discourse, yet rarely receive adequate political representation. The way our districts are drawn not only takes away our voting power, but also impacts how policy is made and how we are treated as constituents. We are working to ensure citizens and underrepresented communities like ours are involved in redistricting. We refuse to let Muslims be left out, split up or ignored in this political process. Gerrymandering is a calculated and dangerous practice undertaken by both political parties to diminish political power among geographic communities, and it disproportionately impacts minority groups who have less political influence as it is. To many of us, too many of us have had little say in who represents us and watched helplessly as laws are passed that hurt families and ignore our needs. One example of many is the neighborhood surrounding the Islamic Center of Cleveland, one of the largest Muslim communities in Northeastern Ohio. It is currently split into multiple congressional districts and multiple state House districts, thus diluting the voting power of Muslims and immigrants in this community. Because of the way the districts are drawn, our elected officials have no incentive to be receptive, accessible or responsive to us or our concerns. Fair and equal districts will return power to the people. This year is our chance to have an open, transparent and truly fair redistricting process. Ohioans know their communities best, and therefore it is imperative that the official redistricting commission allows ample time and an opportunity for the public to provide input. A select number of politicians could not possibly understand the full picture of diversity within our Ohio communities. Fair maps can only be accomplished through input from our diverse community members. This is the only way to ensure minorities do not continue to be politically disenfranchized. Thank you. [Applause]

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [01:11:47] Thank you very much; questions? Mark Hennessey. Mark Hennessey. I don't see him. Randall James. Susan Kaeser. [Applause]

**Kaeser** [01:12:43] Good morning, members of the commission. Thank you so much for holding this hearing as you commence the redistricting process. I hope you maintain an open and transparent process that invites public scrutiny and comment as the process unfolds. My name is Susan Kaeser. I have lived in Cleveland Heights for the last 41 years. I'm very proud to live in a place that is diverse by race, wealth, religion and age characteristics going back more than 60 years. Our diversity is essential to our identity, and it is important that elected officials that represent us value this diversity and are responsive to issues that drive the very survival of this kind of unique community. We are counting on you to honor our situation. In a representative form of government, it seems to me there are three really important principles. A high quality system of public education that prepares our youth for responsive and responsible citizenship, uniform and inclusive access to the ballot, and districts that allow for maximum representation of the interests of residents and that do not advantage any group or political party. All three are critical to our democracy. They should not be partisan ideas. How you define districts is critical because of the legislature's control of these fundamentals of a functioning democracy. We are looking to you to respond to the will of 71 percent of the voters who approved the amendments, the call for a transparent and responsive process that leads to fair districts in Ohio. My specific policy concern is how well the legislature fulfills its obligation to fund and operate a high quality system of public schools. As you know, at least 90 percent of the children in Ohio, children whose parents are Democrats and Republicans and independents, attend our public schools. Yet despite their dominance and central role in our democracy, the legislators, legislature, consistently makes them a stepchild of state government. It has become so partisan that legislators consistently prioritize private options, belittle the public system they are sworn to protect, and weaken its capacity to fulfill its essential role. This issue is not [Applause] This issue is not the only one, of course, that troubles me. But it is evidence that the legislature is so out of balance that it is unwilling to prioritize the interests of most of the children in Ohio. I urge you to pursue the redistricting process in a way that honors the spirit in which it was approved by the voters of Ohio, to make sure all interests are fairly represented and that partisan purposes do not interfere with democratic purposes. Thank you very much and thank you, Senator Sykes, for your leadership in public education.

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [01:15:55] Thank you so much. Thank you. [Applause]  
Susan Kido. Susan Kido. Matt Kuhns.

**Kuhns** [01:16:30] Thank you very much. My name is Matt Kuhns, I am a resident of Lakewood, Ohio. I would like to briefly address the larger picture here. Partisan gerrymandering is quite real. It is quite effective at imposing preferred outcomes upon elections and thereby thwarting responsive representative democracy. Ohio has been thoroughly and indefensibly gerrymandered for the past decade, and that was very intentional. Ohio voters are clearly against partisan gerrymandering and want it ended. These are things we know. Unfortunately, those responsible for gerrymandering Ohio have yet to concede real wrongdoing or to make amends. The proceedings are 2021, from which we must hope will at least emerge some remedy, have thus far not revealed convincing goodwill toward the general public or sincerity about delivering reforms and fair maps. The hearings now underway raise more questions about intent than they satisfy. In the absence of proposed maps, it's unclear what we can tell you, despite the wonderful testimony we're hearing, which we have not already been able to say and have said many times. If the commission just wishes to take the temperature of Ohio on the issue of redistricting in case it has changed, you might note the yard signs which are not only in this room but throughout neighborhoods, saying "It's time for fair districts" and "End



gerrymandering now." I see many of these signs. I have yet to see even one road sign advocating "Muscle (?) through more gerrymanders and skew Ohio election results for 10 more years." [Laughter] If, however, you believe sincerely that these listening sessions will provide value to a fair redistricting process, then they should have started months ago. You should also schedule some outside the average workday. [Applause] This commission should have convened months ago. If the commission could convene before census data and the commission can hold hearings before draft maps are prepared, then there was no valid reason for delaying so long. Additionally, the partisan attempt within the General Assembly to lawyer up before doing anything else, using public resources, did not inspire confidence either. [Applause] Before concluding, I do want to make clear that I am addressing all members of the commission and not just beating up on some. The commission's first long awaited meeting opened and closed so quickly that it felt like a prank at our expense. And yet the commission happily adjourned as though every member was in on the joke. We deserve better and we have demanded better than the insult to democracy inflicted over the past decade. If the members of this commission sincerely want to deliver better, not just talk about it, but actually deliver it, great! But the standard set so far this year is not living up to that aspiration. Thank you and good day. [Applause]

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [01:19:21] Thank you very much for your testimony, appreciate it. Terry Carson.

**Carson** [01:19:33] Good morning. I'm Terry Carson, I vote in the 76th House district. And I want to thank you all for your service, the staff as well as the designees and the office holders. The work of the people is very difficult and mostly unrewarded. I want to tell you that 50 years ago I started an insurance agency. And for most of those 50 years, I was active in the agency. I retired, mostly retired 2 years ago. And I want to tell you that during, at the beginning of my, I guess, practice, people held a very positive feeling about Ohio. And that has changed in the last 10 years. I've had hundreds of thousands of conversations with people over those 50 years. Obviously I continue to have conversations with people, but people feel like Ohio is a failing state, if not a failed state. They don't use those words, but that's what they're really thinking. [Applause] And they've lost confidence in a state where one party gets 52 percent of the vote, but 75 percent of the seats. [Applause] So people say, "Why should I vote? It's not really going to matter, I'm in a district that is going to keep electing the same people over and over again." And I'll tell you what that results in, it results in a lack of leadership, a lack of new ideas, a lack of progress. And we just keep spinning around in a in a tale, just chasing our tail. You know, I've had the great fortune to be in 60 foreign countries. And have had the great fortune of being all over the United States. And I see that Ohio is, in fact a failed state. It's just very difficult to see unless you have some long term perspective. And so I think without a healthy exchange of ideas, there's no progress, there's no analysis of what's happened in the past. There's no hope to make changes. And that's really all we have in our lives, our hope that things are going to be better, that things are going to change. Thank you. [Applause]

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [01:22:21] Thank you, Mr. Carson. Susan Lewis.

**Lewis** [01:22:37] My name is Susan Lewis and my family has lived in Westlake, North Olmstead, Bay Village, Fairview Park, since the 1920s. That's 100 years. My Ohio Senate district now extends from the Lorraine County line in a U shape around Cleveland to the Far East Side and Mayfield Heights. My congressional district is now shaped like a backward J going from West Lake all the way south to Wadsworth and Wooster and then east through several rural communities. This feels to me like taxation without

representation. [Applause] I'm disappointed that this commission has provided such limited hours for testimony from the public. Public input could have been ongoing since many weeks ago, and now the commission has it in one week. There are no evening hours or weekend hours, effectively eliminating testimony from people who work regular hours. There is essentially [Applause] There is essentially one three hour opportunity on one day for all of the voters of the Greater Cleveland area. I have several family members and friends who are teachers who are very interested in this fair district issue and process, and all that goes on in Columbus that affects them, who cannot attend because they are back in school. I hope this commission will be faithful to the will of the voters of Ohio and follow the rules for creating new fair districts. A lot of people are paying attention to how this goes. And I urge you to reserve larger rooms. [Laughter and Applause] Thank you.

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [01:24:27] Felicitas Sanchez.

**Sanchez** [01:24:42] Oh I seem to have misplaced my notes. Pardon me. Oh I still can't find them, oh no. I apologize, commission. I seem to have misplaced my notes. All right, I'll have to just wing it. My name is Felicitas Sanchez and I live in Lakewood, Ohio. I want to thank the commission for allowing me this time to express my feelings on the redistricting that's happening in Ohio this year. I wanted to talk about District 9, where I live, and it stretches from Cleveland to Toledo.

**Audience** [01:25:32] Speak in to the mic.

**Sanchez** [01:25:32] I'm sorry, and -

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [01:25:34] Move closer to the mic, please.

**Sanchez** [01:25:36] I couldn't find that note. But anyway- Oh I found it! OK, I won't start over. I want to thank the commission for giving me this opportunity to express my feelings on redistricting in Ohio. I feel that communities need to be kept together. I live in Lakewood and I am in District 9, which stretches from Cleveland to Toledo. I have family that live in Castalia, just outside Sandusky, and I see the vast difference in our hometowns. They know that I live in a city and they live in, they live among farms in Sandusky. I feel we each can be better representative, represented, by representatives that are closer to where we live. The voters of Ohio in 2015 and 2018 have asked for a fair map, by asking for reforms. Let's keep our communities, towns and counties together and get the fair representation we have asked for. Thank you. [Applause].

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [01:26:42] Thank you. Daisy Reish. Reish.

**Reish** [01:26:50] Reish.

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [01:26:56] Reish.

**Reish** [01:26:56] You've heard, you've heard - My name is Daisy Reish, and thank you for letting me speak. I'm here to talk about personal. I agree with everybody that's already spoke, but I'm politically involved and I work a lot to try and get candidates elected. But I can't get a candidate elected because it's so gerrymandered. I put my money in it. I go door to door. I do everything that's possible to get somebody elected. That cannot happen in my district. I live in Lorain County, which was Democrat, but I'm in a Republican district; 57 and 7. I helped a candidate, one who was airplane pilot, Navy. He had a degree, law degree, and he could win and do a lot for the state of Ohio. Did that happen? No. A pig

farmer won it. Now, what do you think of that? [Laughter] You know? So and I helped one thousand kids register to vote, two years ago. And one of them voted, because they don't think their vote counts. It's not because the vote doesn't count. It's because they know that it's going to be Republican or Democrat. That is why they don't vote. And that's the young people in this district. My vote doesn't count. In 57 and 7, my vote doesn't count. I called my representatives constantly and they never vote for me. They always vote the opposite [Applause] And they listen, but they don't do anything about it. So in order for us to become a better state, we need to have gerrymandering go away, and let people vote the way they feel and they want everything to happen. Thank you. [Applause].

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [01:29:28] Thank you very much. Cristos [Indecipherable].

**Cristos\*** [01:30:07] Hi, my name is Cristos [Indecipherable]. I'm a resident of Shaker Heights. First off, I want to thank you all for coming out here today. But what I wanted to talk about isn't, you know, a lot of people have come up here and they've cited numbers and they've shown maps. And, you know, I'm not the most eloquent person here. I'm the smartest person here. But what I am is an Ohio citizen. And the fact that there are so many other citizens showing up today really just shows how important this is, that we have fair districts. And frankly, you know, it pisses me off that we have so many people showing up. And my question is to you, will you all show up when it comes time to draw the maps? Because I don't think you will. [Applause] And that pains me to say that. And my challenge to you is this: simply prove me wrong. That's all you have to do. Just draw up some fair maps, make it so that votes actually matter for the first time in a decade. And you know, it almost feels helpless. It feels like that episode of The Twilight Zone where the guy sitting in the plane and, you know, he's shouting, "There's a man on the wing of the plane." That's what it feels like right now. We're all pointing at the man on the wing of the plane, which is, you know, unfair districts. And you, I just want you to see that. And I want you to see how messed up this all is, how disturbing it is, how undemocratic it all is, because it's, this has to be representative. What's been going on this past decade is just, it's disgusting, it's abhorrent. And it scares me that so many people are willing to show up today and speak out against this. And odds are it stays the same or gets worse. And that's really disturbing. Time and time again, I have friends from out of state who like to bash Ohio. And, you know, of course, I'm politically involved, a lot of them involved in politics as well. And they love to point to the maps and say, you know, just like, you know, what the hell is this? And I don't know. I can't answer them that. And, you know, I don't know how many elected officials could answer that. That, you know, what is, what's up with our maps? And the voters in 2018, they came out and they voted on Issue 1 and they said, we want fair districts. We're all here today saying we want fair districts. You know, you're going to hear from a lot of people over the next week, should have amendments months, but you know, this next week, you'll hear a lot of people, you'll hear a lot of voices, you'll hear a lot of frustration. And I just want you all to go ahead and listen and take that in and understand that what's going on, the status quo, it's not OK and it should change. And if I, you know, if I want you to leave here with just one message, remembering one thing, just three words. When you're drawing new maps, make them fair. That's all you need to do. [Applause] It shouldn't be a high bar. It shouldn't be a tall ask. Make them fair. Thank you for your time. [Applause]

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [01:32:54] Thank you. Are there any questions at all, any questions? Thank you very much. Andrea Mitchell.

**Mitchell** [01:33:13] Good morning, Commissioners. On the form, you have to check whether you represent the organization or yourself. I just had a personal comment I

wanted to make, and then I do have a statement representing an organization. I concur with so many of the speakers who have spoken before me, especially Mr. Williams and Mr. Kuhnz and Ms. Lewis. Look at the time of this presentation. There are so many people here who probably have taken time out of work to be here, to voice their opinions. It's set on the first day of school at Cleveland State University. It took me 20 minutes to get a parking space to be here, but it was important. And I wanted to bring a voice not only for myself, but for my organization. Now, greetings Commissioners. My name is Andrea Mitchell and I'm a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Incorporated, Greater Cleveland Alumni Chapter. Political awareness and involvement is one of the core programmatic (?) thrusts of Delta Sigma Theta. So we want to thank you first, for this opportunity to address this very consequential matter of fair districts. Here in Greater Cleveland, in Cuyahoga County, we believe that people should choose their own representatives, not elected officials choosing whom they want to represent. [Applause] The latter [Laughter] Thank you. The latter leads to extreme marginalization and an imbalance of power, and that's why Ohioans voted two times, twice, to improve the process of drawing district lines, both for the Ohio legislative districts and the U.S. Congress, in overwhelming numbers. Some years ago, the average majority of Ohioans probably didn't even know what gerrymandering was, let alone care about redistricting and the process. But now your constituents are paying attention. We know that it is harder [Applause] It is harder to draw a gerrymandered map, tailored to produce a particular outcome, than to draw a fair map. [Applause] The current, the current twelve to four U.S. congressional map is the product of a lot of hard work to manipulate the lines to achieve a particular outcome. This year, citizens are taking part in mapmaking competitions sponsored by Common Cause, the League of Women Voters, and several other advocates. The competition will produce fair maps drawn in accordance with new redistricting rules. The legislator can no, the legislature can no longer pretend that the maps that they have produced are the best and the only possible option. Bipartisan maps would be the best outcome for the people of Ohio. And accordingly, that is our expectation and our goal. I thank you for your time and consideration and look forward to hearing how you plan on accomplishing fair maps.

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [01:36:24] Any questions? Thank you very much. John Shaw.

**Shaw** [01:36:42] Good morning. I came here with absolutely no intention of speaking, and I may think that was the right thing to do by the time I'm done here. But when I'm in a forum like this and I hear these kind of things, the one thing I go back to, for people of a certain age, remember a cartoonist by name of Walt Kelly and his character, Pogo, who was quoted as saying, "We have met the enemy and he is us." So I'm going to specifically disclude everybody here from that because they took the time to come out here. But when I hear numbers of quoted, like 70 percent of the people voted for the constitutional amendment to change things- 70 percent of what? 70 percent of the people who came out to vote that day. Well, that was probably 40 percent of the elected, of the registered voters at that particular election. It's embarrassing. Our voting numbers are an embarrassment. So we're asking you to do is basically save us from ourselves. Do the least you can do and make the districts fair so that at least the people who are willing to come out and take a stand and actually cast ballots have a reasonable chance. And then we need someone else to step up and teach us how important it is that in a functioning democracy, people have to participate. So I'm just asking you to do the least you can do, which is make it fair to start with so the people who do care get good results. Thank you. [Applause]

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [01:38:20] Any questions at all? Matthew Hahn. Hahn.

**Hahn** [01:38:49] Good morning to the commission.

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [01:38:51] Good morning.

**Hahn** [01:38:52] My name is Matthew Hahn. I am a visiting professor at the Cleveland Marshall School of Law. I apologize for my casual attire, I just got back into town. And I'm also a former voting rights litigator. So I don't want to speak at length about the procedural cost of unfair maps, but I hope that's something that the commission takes into account. I echo the sentiments of those who have spoken before me, and I'd just like to emphasize a few things. First, that competitive districts do increase turnout. As somebody mentioned, we have a municipal election in Cleveland that's happening right now. The mail ballot request rates for the three wards that have competitive seeming elections are already approximately double that of the other wards in the city. So drawing competitive districts actually does make people more invested in the process. It makes our democracy fairer. It makes it more participatory, which is a goal that I hope we all share. I do want to circle back to House Bill 6. I was a public defender before this current roll, so I did go and look at the indictment that was handed down for former Speaker Householder. One of the things that caught my eye is that the allegations of the sort of racketeering conspiracy that created House Bill 6, allegedly, is that the company and Mr. Householder and the other associates actually identified safe districts where they believed they could actually run candidates that would be favorable to voting for Mr. Householder as Speaker and then voting for House Bill 6. When we have elections where we feel like the outcome is predetermined, that allows people like Mr. Householder to even consider this kind of perversion of our democracy. And so that, I think, is one of the things that is at stake in drawing fair maps in Ohio. The commission mentioned a couple, when Mr. Glassman, my esteemed colleague, was speaking, they mentioned that they were looking for a couple of potential ways to tell 'Is this map fair? Is it not fair?' There are all sorts of, you know, great statistical analyses out there. But I would recommend that, just as shorthand because hopefully you'll be looking at a lot of different proposed maps, you'll be considering them very closely, and if you are two of the easy shorthand metrics that voting rights litigators tend to use are the efficiency gap, which measures how many votes in an election spread across districts are quote unquote wasted. They're not necessary for majorities in the, like winning majorities in those districts. Generally, an efficiency gap of less than 7 percent is considered acceptable. The Ohio maps currently state, state House, state Senate and Congressional, I believe are 9 percent, 9 percent and 14 percent. In addition, another maybe easier to understand metric is the mean median gap. Basically the middle district, how far is it away from the state as a whole? You should be aiming for close to zero for that to be fair. You just want that number to be as low as possible. I believe, if I remember correctly, that those numbers for the three maps right now are 5 percent, 7 percent and 16 percent. In addition, I do want to sort of diverge from some of my friends who have spoken here. And I want to caution the commission not to rely solely on compactness. Fair districts tend to be compact. Compact districts do not have to be fair. There are ways to draw districts that look OK, but actually do split up communities of interest. And so I would just caution the commission to think very critically about the maps you're seeing. Think about these other metrics that are there and to sort of address and decide on district lines accordingly. Thank you very much.

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [01:43:48] Mr. Hahn, a question. As I have inquired with the other scholars that have testified today, to take a look at the representational fairness measure that's included in the Constitution, and if you could submit some comments on that that we could share with the body, that would be great.

**Hahn** [01:44:07] Okay, thank you.

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [01:44:07] Thank you. Any other questions? [Applause] Comments? Thank you very much. Sue Dyke. [Applause]

**Dyke** [01:44:26] Sorry, I was not going to testify today at all. But there are a couple of things that really stood out to me that I'm going to cover with the commission today. I live in Cleveland Heights. I'm in House District 9. Congressional, I'm sorry, Senate District 23 and Congressional - people are texting me, I'm sorry - Congressional District 11, where Marcia Fudge won in 2020 by eighty two points. OK, that is probably the largest margins in the country. I don't actually know, but I've got to assume that that's one of the largest margins in the country and that's because of gerrymandering. While I agree with her, she also is not accountable to me. I agree with her politics, but she wasn't accountable to me. So, and I don't want to spend a whole lot of time talking about congressional districts, but I also want you to know that I have been, I collected over 5000 signatures in 2017 and 2018 to get fair maps on the ballot. And so I've probably talked to more people than you may have ever talked to in your whole lives. Personally, face to face, and most people, almost everyone, was appalled about how unfair and how rigged our maps are here in Ohio. I have also, I've done work with the League of Women Voters, fair districts, campaigns, including local issues, statewide issues, federal and state, legislative and local, candidate campaigns, as well as right now actively involved in a very grassroots voter engagement campaign. So I'm talking to the voters more than you are on a daily basis. So I have a sense of how people feel, whether their votes matter or not. They may go and vote, but they don't feel like they don't, that they matter. I have also brought many people, some who spoke here tonight, into the process to understand gerrymandering and its impacts across the state and across the country. I lead a small little group of people who call every week. We have been calling since March. We have been calling state legislators. We have been calling, in just last week we called when we found out who was on the commission. We called the Secretary of State's office, Frank LaRose. We called Auditor's office. We called the Governor's office. We also call Senator Sykes' office and Minority Leader Sykes' office as well. We call all of you. But sadly, the thing that motivated me to talk today was the fact that the Republican component, the Republican members of this commission, except for one - thank you, Auditor Keith Faber, for being here - do not seem to be interested in participating in this very important discussion. It makes me [Applause] While I'm sure you all do a very nice job. Mr. Donahue, Senator Gavarone, Representative Oelslager, and Mr. Madrid from the Secretary of State's office, your bosses aren't here. The co-chair of the commission, Republican co-chair of the commission, what? Couldn't even be bothered to show up today? Now, was that because [Applause] Is that because... I don't even know why, is that because these meetings were hastily scheduled in the middle of the day? The Governor's not here. He's on the commission. I called Secretary Frank LaRose's office last week, and so did my group members. And you know what they were told? They were, they got kicked down the road, kicked the can down the road, to the co-chairs of the commission. Alright? We also called Auditor Faber's office, and we spoke to, I spoke to a really lovely woman. And I was calling before you would announce these hearings and before you had announced how we could actually get up and speak today. And as she was looking for information, she came across the website for equal districts that talked about how we could testify or practice our testimony with the Equal Districts advocacy group. There was nothing. Here we are last Wednesday trying to figure out how can we testify. And I appreciate the fact that a website went up on Friday for us to submit our testimony for these public hearings. But there's still nowhere for for the public to comment when the maps do finally come out. There is no portal for us to submit maps. [Applause] I'm almost getting the sense that this process is not being taken seriously. And

how could that be? You've had three years to get ready for this. This is [Applause] Sorry, I am going totally off script, but I just feel so strongly about this. It's almost like you want to retain the Republican super majority in the House and the Senate so you can just keep going about and not listening to your voters. [Applause] Let me see, what else did I want to say, since I went totally off script. [Laughter] I want this commission - and I want to, first of all, thank the Democratic members, two, that showed up and are taking this process seriously. I want to know, these were my questions, where is Republican Secretary of State Frank LaRose? Where is Republican House Speaker Cupp? Where is Republican Senate President Matt Huffman? Where is his Republican co-chair and House Speaker, again, Cupp? And where is our Governor? Where are they? I just can't believe that they are taking this process seriously if they are not here to listen to the public. How can we believe that you are going to take this once in a decade opportunity to bring democracy to Ohio? Because right now it's not a democratic state. How are we supposed to believe that you are going to take this seriously? The Republican members, in specifically, need to prove to the voters and all Ohioans that they are taking this once- sorry, I'm repeating myself. Be present and listen to us. I want you to as surrogates and designees, that's the proper word, to tell them to come. Alright? or is this what we're going to have all week? I know we're taking time out of your day, but shoot, this was announced early, late, last week and here we are. We have put aside everything to come here today. [Applause] And we are not getting the same response from the people who are supposed to be on this commission. We have no longer have checks and balances, and this is what I want to leave you with, in Ohio. With the gerrymandered districts, we do not have democracy. We have, we have no checks and balances. Supreme Court, Governor, state legislature, all of the statewide offices, are all Republican. And Ohio is not an all Republican state, and you all know that. And I want to see you take this process seriously. I want your bosses to take this process seriously. And you need to change. And give us proper representation in this state. Immediately. Thank you. [Applause]

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [01:52:47] Are there any questions for Ms. Dyke? Any questions? Thank you very much. Ruth Gillett. Gillett?

**Gillett** [01:53:30] Hello, my name is Ruth Gillett. I'm a resident of the city of Lakewood, which is a western suburb of Cuyahoga County. Currently Lakewood is in the 9th Congressional District, the 13th House District, and the 23rd Ohio Senate District. I appreciate the opportunity to submit written testimony and this verbal testimony to the Ohio District Redistricting Commission about this process and the importance of assuring that it is done fairly and openly. I would like to endorse four suggestions to achieve these objectives. In part, I paraphrased ideas that came from students in a class taught by Professor Dennis Turner this past winter at the University of Dayton Osher Lifelong Learning Program. So first, we should develop a new timeline for completing the redistricting process and petition the Ohio Supreme Court for approval. Because of the delayed release of the 2020 census data and the failure of state leadership to begin Ohio's process earlier, it is impossible for Ohio to meet the deadlines written into the redistricting legislation. Redistricting is too important and will be with us for a decade. Let's try to do a good job. Number two, establish a nonpartisan committee that does not include elected persons or politicians to develop mandatory guidelines for drawing the district boundaries. Use a computer program based on these guidelines to generate an initial map for public comment. Number three, establish a nonpartisan committee that does not include elected personnel or politicians to review that map. And four, to continue providing statewide public comment opportunities to review and revise the proposed map until there is general public consensus, say, 70 percent approval rating per the percentage of state voters who approved redistricting reform in 2015 and 2018. In addition to these specific suggestions, I

have participated in a mapmaking process coordinated through the League of Women Voters and Fair Districts Ohio. The map our group developed for Lakewood has been submitted to the commission through the required portal. So Albert Einstein said "Not everything that can be counted matters and not everything that matters can be counted." Today, people have made clear that what matters in drawing districts is that they be fair and that the process be inclusive. I think if Albert were here today, he would clearly agree with this approach. Thank you very much for this opportunity to provide comment.

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [01:56:37] Are there any questions for Ms. Gillett? Thank you very much. Kate Warren.

**Warren** [01:56:58] Good morning. I want to thank the Redistricting Commission for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Kate Warren. I live in the city of Cleveland in the 9th Congressional District, in the 15th State House District, and in the 23rd State Senate District. I'm also currently a candidate for Cleveland City Council in Ward 13, located predominantly in the old Brooklyn neighborhood of Cleveland. And as a candidate, I have the opportunity to speak with voters nearly every day. And the first thing I would like to share is the confusion created, by the way that our congressional districts are currently drawn. I know we've been asked to limit our remarks to state districts, but I have a story to share that I believe illustrates a larger point. Just before the special election, the primary special election in the 11th Congressional District, I was talking with many voters in my Ward who told me that they were getting ready to vote in the special election. They had been inundated with ads, yard signs and social media posts about the election. And I had to inform them, much to their confusion, that our neighborhood wouldn't be voting in the special election. Although much of Cleveland, as part of the 11th Congressional District, including neighbors who live just one and a half miles north of me and two and a half miles east of me, the area where I live is represented by Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur, who lives 95 miles away in the city of Toledo. In fact, if I were to drive up to where my congresswoman lives, I would have to drive through five other congressional districts to get there. So the way that these maps are drawn creates confusion and it does not promote participation in our government. The same confusion and lack of compactness impacts state districts, arguably more so. For example, the old Brooklyn neighborhood where I live is split between the 15th and the 11th state House Districts in ways that look incoherent and nonsensical. I am pleased that under the new rules approved by voters, Cleveland cannot be split into multiple congressional districts. And I will be watching closely to see that that, that the commission follows that basic rule. Excuse me, that the legislature follows that basic rule. As an Ohio voter, an engaged citizen, and as someone who has participated in both nonpartisan and partisan political activity, I believe that Ohioans deserve for our legislators to follow both the letter and the spirit of these redistricting reforms. Gerrymandered districts serve no one except hyper partisan politicians. Everyday Ohioans deserve to live in districts that represent our interests and are reflective of our communities, communities which are beautifully diverse in opinion, racial and ethnic background, and socioeconomic status. We deserve the ability to elect legislators who will be tasked with the hard but important job of legislating on behalf of their diverse communities, finding common values and compromising. Finally, I would like to address, as many folks before me have, the importance of collecting public input in the process. I have been involved in and closely following the collection of and reporting of census data. So I understand the unique time constraints of the pandemic has presented, given our constitutional deadlines for map making. But I urge the committee, as many others have, to not give short shrift to the collection of public input in these maps. I request that the committee offer opportunities for citizens to submit maps for consideration, and I urge the committee to make available public hearings that take place outside of business



hours and possibly offer virtual forums. I was messaging with a neighbor who has been very active in advocating for redistricting reform, he even created a petition and was circulating it, and I asked if he was going to attend today, but unfortunately he has to work. So he is not here to share what he has heard from the folks he's talked to. So I want to thank you in advance for your consideration in making sure that this is a fair and transparent process. And I look forward to following closely that you all are following the rules that the voters approved. Thank you. [Applause]

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [02:00:57] Thank you. Are there any questions? Ms. Cynthia White. Cynthia White. [Applause]

**White** [02:01:26] Hello, my name is Cynthia White and I live in Bay Village, which is in districts 9, 16 and 24. I would like to tell you about some of my experiences with redistricting. I was one of the many fair districts volunteers in 2017 that came from every county in Ohio who gathered signatures on a petition to create a constitutional amendment which would prohibit partisan gerrymandering of congressional districts. I know this hearing is focusing on state level districts, so my testimony today is about what I learned about public knowledge and attitudes toward gerrymandering in general. I went to multiple public gatherings all around northeast Ohio over a nine month period of time, asking a large variety of people to sign my petition. When I first started out, most people did not know what the word gerrymandering meant. I would show them the map of Ohio with the district lines drawn on it and point out our most famous gerrymandered district, District 9, the snake on the lake, stretching from Marcy Kaptur's house in Toledo, to Dennis Kucinich's house in Cleveland. Party affiliation did not seem to matter when it came to signing the petition. Members of both parties explicitly stated that they wanted their democracy to be fair. Some voters who identified as a Republican might have been initially reluctant to sign, saying that they knew that the Republicans had an advantage and they liked it that way. However, when I pointed out that they were living in the snake on the lake and that that was a packed Democratic district which was not competitive for Republicans, they understood the negative impact of gerrymandering and most changed their mind and enthusiastically signed. As the months went by, public enthusiasm built and an increasing percentage of people knew exactly what gerrymandering was before I said anything and many approached me to sign before I even asked them. My state representative, District 16, is an example of a fairly drawn district that is compact, representative and competitive. It changed hands from Republican to Democrat in 2020, one of the few in the state that did. It should be kept unchanged. We did some community mapping with the Bay Village League of Women Voters, and we automatically drew that district as being representing our interests. My state District 24 on the other, my state Senate District 24, on the other hand, is every bit as gerrymandered as my congressional district. It is 'U' shaped, picking up the wealthier suburbs around Cleveland, along the western, southern and eastern borders of the county. It has not changed hands during the entire decade and it can't remain intact under the current rules. I think the Redistricting Commission owes it to the citizens of Ohio to faithfully execute the intent of the amendments that they have passed. And I hope you will do so. As you can tell from this audience today, we will be watching and making sure that the public understands your work. Thank you very much.

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [02:04:43] Thank you for your presentation and for watching us. We appreciate it. Shari Obrenski?

**Obrenski** [02:05:14] Good afternoon. Is it, it's almost afternoon, we've got nine minutes. I won't go that long. My name is Share Obrenski, I'm the president of the Cleveland Teachers Union. I am a first time testifier, long time voter. I am here today to represent the

nearly 5000 members of the Cleveland Teachers Union. We are teachers, paraprofessionals and related service providers who have our, for the most of us, very first day of school with children today. Which is why you don't see more of my members here, because they're working with kids, doing their job. As many of our other, as many of the other testimony that you've heard indicated, these hours are not exactly convenient for those who wish to be active in the political process. So I'm here on their behalf. Prior to becoming the president of the Cleveland Teachers Union, I was an American history and government teacher for 22 years in Cleveland. Every single year, I would encourage my students to learn as much as they could about the political process. We would talk about the census, we would talk about districting and redistricting. They even worked on maps themselves to see how the districts were drawn. And invariably, when we would get to Ohio and we would look at the maps, my students could not understand why they were drawn the way they were drawn. They looked at them and they knew, as 15 and 16 and 17 year old kids, that it was unfair. They knew it was unfair. And I think we all know that the way things are currently drawn are unfair. We have to do better. The way our districts are currently drawn takes away the voice of the people. They also largely disadvantage those that have the least voice already in our society. They uniquely disadvantaged, black and brown people in our society. They uniquely disadvantage those that are in poverty because the way the districts are drawn, we make sure that those folks don't have a big enough say. And that's not right. You are here, and I appreciate all of you who are here today, to make sure that every voter's voice is heard. Whether they choose to come to the polls or not. And that you are representing every citizen in drawing the lines of these districts, so that our children have the public education they need. So that the ills that we have in our society are adequately addressed by the state legislature and not just the pet project of the day. And so that we don't have politicians who may become arrested due to corruption running unopposed because their districts are so uncompetitive. So I implore you today. [Applause] To listen to all that you have heard, take it to heart, take it back to those who should be in the room with, in the room here with us today. Schedule hearings moving forward that working people can attend and can see what's happening in this process. And that you do the right thing, because not only are all of us watching, not only the voters of Ohio are watching, but our children are watching and they deserve better. Thank you. [Applause]

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [02:08:48] Any questions at all? Thomas Hach.

**Hach** [02:09:20] Members of the commission, thank you very much for the opportunity to speak. My name is Tom Hach. I'm the executive director of Free Ohio Now, which is a liberty organization throughout the state, and I represent about almost 5000 members of my organization throughout the state. I'd like to start by saying that when you look at Ohio, if you look at the political offices that are statewide, Governor, Secretary of State, Attorney General, Auditor, and then we recently had a presidential election. Republicans won all of them, every single one of them. Ohio is a Republican state. If we're going to have fair districts, Republicans dominate. Republicans need to be represented by what they have earned. It is incredibly important for all of us that voters' votes do count, is no doubt, but you can't gerrymander a state. So when it counts the most, when you have a whole state that can't be gerrymandered and all five of those political offices have been won by Republicans, that needs to be reflected in the redistricting. That absolutely has to be part of the equation. I'd also say that. What's going on in this room really is a- I was a little surprised and I think that whoever decided to have all of these hearings at colleges really wasn't thinking very clearly, to be honest with you. You do not have a representative cross-section of Ohio in this room. I'm the only one who has really spoken up in favor of a different perspective on what fairness is. This is wrong. You need to have another week of

hearing from the people. Here's a map. I know it's not very well printed. Here's here's a map, seven counties were blue in the presidential election and I'm happy to give this, too.

**Audience** [02:11:38] [Indecipherable].

**Hach** [02:11:38] You know, why don't why don't you talk to me afterwards and we'll have a conversation about masks. Please don't interrupt.

**Audience** [02:11:45] [Indecipherable shouting].

**Hach** [02:11:45] Please don't interrupt. [Indecipherable]

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [02:11:47] Please allow the speaker to speak, please.

**Hach** [02:11:51] So this is representative of the fact that this audience is not reflective of Ohio as a whole. Who's been heckled? The guy who speaks out different than anybody else. This is wrong. You need to have another week where you need to, if you look at that map, 7 of the counties were blue, 81 of them were red, and yet all of them are at universities. That's wrong. You need to have another week and you can have them at career centers throughout Ohio and you can get the cross-section that you need. This is just, what you're being is bullied. You're being bullied by one half of the of the voting electorate and you're not hearing from the other half. This is wrong. And I'm really disappointed in how this was organized. Thank you very much for your time. [Applause]

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [02:12:41] Are there any questions? We'd like to notify the audience that we want to give respect for every presenter and please give them, extend everyone a courtesy.

**Audience** [02:13:00] The campus rules of having a mask [Indecipherable].

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [02:13:01] It is not our roll [Applause] It is not our role to enforce university.

**Audience** [02:13:08] [Indecipherable].

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [02:13:08] Oh, well. [Indecipherable] Rita Mayhew, please. Please.

**Audience** [02:13:18] [Indecipherable] Go get security. [Indecipherable] Get up! [Indecipherable]

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [02:13:27] Campus security. [Indecipherable] Did you fill out a form?

**Audience** [02:13:37] [Indecipherable] a form.

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [02:13:39] Do you have a - you can fill out a witness slip, if you'd like to speak. Can we make sure? Yeah, if you could give us that please, the witness slip.

**Mayhew** [02:13:56] Hi.

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [02:13:57] Yes.

**Mayhew** [02:13:57] My name is Rita Mayhew, and I'm from North Ridgeville, Senate District 13, Ohio House District 57. I was born and raised in Cleveland, Cuyahoga County. I taught in Cleveland, Strongsville, Westlake. I spent 30+ years with my husband in the military. We just came back to Lorain. So and when you come to me, either the last, you're darn close. So a lot of what I wanted to say has already been said. However, I can second it all and I would like to do that. I especially would like to see the process extended to better hours. And if it would be better at different sites, I'm really not against that either. However, with all due respect, you most certainly can gerrymander states. It's been done all over the place so to say that you cannot gerrymander a state I think is not exactly accurate. I will also say that most people here have supported a fair districting. And in any kind of commission like this, you're going to have compromises, which means they're going to be things that we like and things that we don't like, we have to keep that in mind. But no matter how you slice it, you need to slice it fairly. And this is not been, this state is a joke. I've lived all over the state. Gerrymandering is definitely a joke. So I would appreciate you changing that. My main focus now, since I'm coming to the end, is how are you going to proceed forward? I guess these are more questions for you. What are you going to do? We're concerned about this little time. We didn't get any maps, so we have nothing to really look at to say, yes, this is good or no, this is not good. We have no, we aren't sure the process going forward. Could you make your website better? Could you have more information out that's really pertinent to people, so people can understand what this process is going forward? Because honestly, there's not a whole lot of time to do this. I don't see how you're going to listen to all this stuff and get these maps by, when is it, the end of September? Or something like that. I mean, how are we going to do this? So could you be a lot more specific on getting information out, get the newspapers more involved, and the TV in that? I don't know who was here, but didn't look like a lot of people. This is important to people, but honestly, I don't think a lot of people knew about it. I mean, that's your responsibility. If you really want to make this better, you have to let people know. And the onus, sadly, right now is on Republicans because there's five of you compared to two Democrats. So, you know, it's nice to have what you have. I understand that. But it's also your chance to be courageous and do the right thing, to be fair for everybody. For everybody. That's what this is about. I understand that it's nice to have what you have. You know, nobody wants to give up their bailiwick in their job or any place else. But it's not right, you know tha. If people aren't represented, it's not right. Bottom line, please do the right thing. [Applause]

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [02:18:17] Thank you for your comments. And questions at all? Soren Hansen.

**Hansen** [02:18:43] My name is Soren Hansen. I'm a resident of Lakewood. I've lived in-

**Audience** [02:18:50] Louder.

**Hansen** [02:18:50] My name is Soren Hansen. I'm a resident of Lakewood and I've lived in Shaker Heights and Bay-

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [02:18:57] Just a second, please. Can we have everyone's attention, please? Do we have security? They're on their way? The University security, I believe it's on their way, and I will ask you to let them handle that issue, please. Sorry, Mr. Hansen.

**Hansen** [02:19:32] Thank you.

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [02:19:32] You may go ahead.

**Hansen** [02:19:34] I'm also a professional engineer. I've been a consultant in the technology called Geographic Information Systems, and you should all know that gerrymandering is wonderfully done by geographic information systems. And you should really have some technical expertise on your commission to really inform you about how to use the technology. Mark Salling, who is here in Cleveland State University, would be a wonderful candidate. However, what I'm missing here is a list of priorities on how you are going to approach this. And I'd like to suggest at least four different priority, in order. There are two that I think are really significant, in my opinion, belong at the top of your list. And the first one is you want to encourage as many citizens as possible to vote. I think we can all agree on that. And of course, it should be done in a fair and fraudulent free way. The second is each district should have as close as possible to the same number of citizens represented. In other words, the spread should be as small as possible. You've said five percent. I think that you could do even better than five percent. One thing that hasn't been mentioned at all, and I think that belongs in your list of priority objectives, is goals in equity for Ohio minorities. No one has spoken about this at all, and I think it's very important. One of the reasons for gerrymandering is to make sure that we can establish at least one district where the black population of Ohio can assure that a black candidate has a good chance of winning. And that's been established here in this area. However, the current way of gerrymandering is to make that district as big as possible. I suggest that one of the ways, if you're going to gerrymander something for a good cause, like allowing black minorities to win in and have representation in the Congress, in the legislature, is to set a major limit that the number of people in that district should be as small as possible. And it should still, also, in order to be fair, allow the white population living that district to have a fair representation. So I'm suggesting maybe it should be 60 percent possible black population and 40 percent of the other. With those four goals in priority order, we end up with a series of other potentials. So you start out with creating the first district near the city of Cleveland where a large population of black people reside. But make that intentional black district as small as possible, which I already said. And do not allow gerrymandering to political affiliation to benefit any political party. That's got to be part of the decision to make sure that as many people as possible, citizens, can vote. However, do use citizens political affiliation from their last election to group people into any new district. We're not going to get rid of gerrymandering. The geographic information system is such an important technology that is going to be used to gerrymander. So you know exactly where everybody resides, what their last voting record was, and you pick one person who belongs here or there. And that's why we have gerrymandering now. Bad gerrymandering. I'm an advocate for good gerrymandering. And we're going to use the same technology that has been used for bad gerrymandering, for good gerrymandering. And make sure that the political parties are represented as close to as equal in each district. This will ensure citizens will want to vote and have their vote count. Thank you very much and thank you also for your time.

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [02:24:26] Thank you for your presentation. [Applause] Any questions at all? The next presenter is Loh.

**Loh** [02:24:48] Well, good afternoon, everybody. Thank you for all of you coming to Cleveland. I'm Loh. I probably, people in general do not think people like me actually even belong into this country, but unfortunately I'm here. And I have visited our very grand and important Ohio Statehouse many times. So for today's subject, as a minority being the

majority, I have to say one thing. One lady she left, but she used a particular expression and I think lots of people agree. Taxation without representation. Actually be more specifically, it's a representation with our representations. Gerrymandering actually started with one of the vice presidents, long time ago. If you can use your smartphone, Wikipedia will tell you. It is a very scientific calculation. However, it has been misused for a long, long time. So in Ohio, we have all the inequities, all built on the wrong uses of gerrymandering. His name actually is Gerry not "Jerry". Sorry about that. In this case, if we don't stop correcting our maps as a starting point for the whole process, the children in the state will never get a proper education, for example. Back in the state budget sessions, we talk about how difficult and how hard it was to find a proper formula. That goes to our representation without representation. People here all feel the pain. Even you go to vote. The person you voted to go into Ohio Statehouse sometimes doesn't really speak up for you. Senate Bill 17 is one good example. The sponsor of the bill, he wanted to make sure we have no fraud. But even in his district, the people in poverty did not get a representation, to have a proper way in order to have the help they need. For example, SNAP, Medicaid, all of that. Because the eligibility will be completely narrowed down if that particular bill passed and not get executed properly. So this is what we all have to watch out. This room, I have been here several, several times. And I know these dividers should have been taken off. That will make everybody here feel more welcome to be here. If everybody spent the time to be here, all of you, you don't live just next door. You came all the way up here to listen to us. We also make an effort to come here. Some people pay the parking. Some people had to go through all kinds of trouble to getting here. So now we both feel a little bit frustrated. So this is something we can work together to improve. In that case, I would definitely support Ms. Ruth Gillett's suggestion. This whole process maybe should be reconsidered, rescheduled. Yes, there are legal proceedings we have to go through, but it will be worthwhile. At least it will make people rethink their faith to the government, to the voting. Otherwise, 14 people out of 100 come out to vote, and 17 people out of those people saying something. Does that really represent everybody's will in Ohio? Please. That's a no, for sure. We don't need a rocket scientist to figure out that simple mathematics issue. Right? Thank you very much.

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [02:29:08] Thank you. Any questions at all? Steve Ermin. Mimi Foust.

**Plevin-Foust** [02:29:44] Hello, members of the commission, thank you so much for coming here. I'm Mimi Plevin-Foust. I'm a parent. I grew up here in Cleveland, in Shaker Heights. I moved away for a long time. And like so many others, I came back here after I had a child. I'm very happy to be back in Ohio. There is one issue, though, that I find that I'm not happy about, and that is just how gerrymandered our state is. And I say this as someone who is, I'm someone who became a parent after the age of 40. I have one child. I think there's more and more people like me. And the issue that I feel most concerned about is gun violence. And I have, I'm a board member of God before Guns. We're an interfaith advocacy and education group, nonpartisan, working like so many others to reduce gun violence in our state. And just as the parent of one child, I'm concerned, I'm very worried about this issue, because literally every day, every week, in Cleveland, and I think across the state, our children and babies are being killed by gun accidents, by stray bullets. People's husbands and fathers and brothers and sisters and mothers and grandmothers are being killed by guns. Partly because we have a gun policy in the state that is really being run by ALEC and the Buckeye Firearms Institution and whoever, whatever corporation gave them a lot of money last week. And those are the laws that are being written, handed to legislatures and proposed in Ohio, and that people who care about reducing gun violence in Ohio are trying to stop from being passed. And it's

heartbreaking. It's heartbreaking when you are part of a group of advocates who have traveled for hours to come to a committee hearing about whatever is the latest new, completely wacky and extremist gun law that ALEC has given to our legislatures, legislators. And there are no legislators in the hearing to hear the opponent testimony because they don't care. They've been gerrymandered in. Their majority is gerrymandered in. And meanwhile, children are dying. They're dying in their car seats. They're dying in their beds. And, you know, there are common sense bipartisan laws that could be passed if we had a representative legislator, legislature. I mean, child access prevention laws would save children's lives. Red flag laws would save the lives of people who are gun owners and commit, you know, in danger of committing suicide. I mean, those laws, those red flag laws have saved countless lives by reducing the suicide rate among gun owners in other states. There's many common sense laws that we can agree on, like background checks that over 90 percent of Ohioans approve of. If we did not have it. [Applause] Thank you. If we did not have such a gerrymandered state. And and I just... I just think that this would be better for everyone if we had fair districts. It would be better for Republicans, it would save Republican lives, it would save Democratic lives. It would give all of us the chance to have healthier, safer communities in every way. And I urge you to further this process to- I agree with my former neighbor, Tom Hach, that we should have more hearings in more places at more hours, not just during working hours. I also urge you to extend the deadline for finishing this and then to extend the spring primary date into June so that, you know, you can do this properly and you can get good feedback from people on actual, you know, proposed maps. And I'm one of the people who has been calling your offices since March, along with many others, to request that this process begin. Your staffers are wonderful. Thank you so much for hiring such lovely staffers and for being so responsive to us. But I also want to say that not only do we desperately need fairer districts in Ohio, but I hope that would be just the very first step in a process that next goes on to having ranked choice primaries that are not partisan. States that have implemented this have been able to have such better representation. It frees every legislature from the worry about who is the extremist on the right or the left that will challenge them. It allows, once you're elected, it allows legislators to work across the aisle to create truly, you know, bipartisan legislation that's best for the state. Please talk to the states that have passed this because their legislators are much happier. And then, as well, to have public funding, complete public funding, of all campaigns so that you are never having to worry about working for whoever is the highest donor. But you are truly working for the voters who are funding your campaigns. If you do all of that as a package, then gerrymandering is not as scary because you know you're really going to be working for the voters and not challenged by extremists in primaries. Thank you very much. [Applause]

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [02:35:45] Thank you. Are there any questions? Maria Cordaro.

**Cordaro** [02:36:05] OK. My name is Maria Cordero. Louder? Okay. I will try.

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [02:36:14] A little closer to the mic.

**Cordaro** [02:36:15] Okay. I'm a resident of Bedford. And I'm also a member of Free Ohio Now. And I'm up here just to back up Tom. Because I agree that we didn't get any notice that this meeting was going on. The only way I knew about it was an email from him. And that's why I'm not prepared to speak to you, because I didn't expect to talk. But I did take his e-mail and bring it to my friends at my church, and a lot of them are from the area around me, because I live in District 1, 11, sorry. They live in Euclid, Beechwood, Akron and Richfield, and they didn't know anything about this meeting. And we had talked about

it before, about how the districts are weirdly set up. And a lot of my friends don't even know about districts being set up this way, what they have to do with voting rights and how elections go. So if there's a way to tell more people about what's going on now with the redistricting and what it means, because most people I talked to don't really know. It's like, you know, what the districts look like and how the votes are made. I don't know. It's just the only reason I know about any of this election is joining groups like, you know, Free Ohio Now. It's how I get most of my information. So...

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [02:37:57] Well, thank you very much. We certainly appreciate it. Any questions? Thank you very much.

**Cordaro** [02:38:03] Thank you. [Applause].

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [02:38:10] Shane Petty.

**Petty** [02:38:22] Thank all of you for being here today. I am a resident of Middleburg Heights. I didn't come here planning to speak. I came to observe on behalf of an organization. And I do not speak on behalf of that organization. I am here to share personally with you as a local resident, a local pastor, as a voter under the age of 35 with an elementary age daughter. This has been one of the most depressing and demoralizing experiences I've had in public life. To sit here during this hearing. And while I have to say I probably don't vote, in fact I would say I'm almost certainly don't vote in the way that the gentleman who was here earlier, the white gentleman without a mask, does, I agree wholeheartedly with him that we have to find better places, more representative places, more opportunities, more time for these hearings, because this room does not represent the state. This room doesn't even represent the Democratic Party. People here either risk their jobs to be here, either are retired, or they are like me, and we're in a socioeconomic status that allows us jobs with flexibility to be here. And because of that, it's a very, very specific, largely white, largely affluent, group of people that can be here today. And because of the makeup of this room, we've played into stereotypes about liberal elites. We've made fun of a pig farmer. My little daughter had to listen to that. My daughter had to listen to a man be heckled for doing what the majority of people here say is a civic duty. If we want fair districts, we have to have fair districts for every single person in this state, regardless of if they vote red or vote blue. If all votes matter [Applause] they have to matter for everyone. And the way that this was set up, with so little information ahead of time, with so few hearings, in such a short time, in times and places that are not accessible for everyone - we tried 30 some minutes to park, too. This is abhorrent. And as someone who's trying to start a life here, someone who's trying to show a young child that this is how democracy works, I'm ashamed at the way that this has gone down, and I hope and pray that there will be many, many, many other opportunities I have to bring my little girl to see the way that democracy works, because this is not it. We must do better. And I implore you. Thanking all of you for being here, truly the bottom of my heart. We have to do better. Let's do better. Amen? [Applause]

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [02:41:55] Are there any, are there any others that would like to testify today? Can you come forward? Can you be sure to fill out with your slip for us when you finish?

**Hall** [02:42:14] I did submit one through email last night.

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [02:42:18] Okay.



**Hall** [02:42:18] Yep. My name is Kelly Hall. Good afternoon. I won't take too much time here. Thank you for fulfilling your obligation to hear from the public today on an issue as important as redistricting. My name is Kelly Hall. I'm currently a voter of Ohio Senate District 15 and Houston District 18, though I spent the majority of my life as a resident of Avon Lake, Ohio, just 30 minutes from here on Lake Erie. I'll be finishing my fourth year at Ohio State. And I think it's fair to say that my generation and my age group is vastly underrepresented in this room. And it was not until I left home for college in Columbus that I realized just how difficult it is to be a voter in the metropolitan Cleveland area. Racial and partisan gerrymandering has systematically broken down and divided Cleveland's communities, with pockets of conservative and financially well-off voters clumped together in districts sure to produce favorable, predictable electoral outcomes for those already in power at the Statehouse. This is not the spirit of our democracy as a lot of people have emphasized today. Ohio has always been considered a swing state, it is not a dominant Republican state, as someone else has said here today. In the last decade, we've watched as Ohio Republicans gained a supermajority in the Ohio legislature, freely enacting laws that don't serve the needs of a large segment of Ohioans. This year, we have a chance to redraw the maps in favor of all of us, where we get to choose our elected officials rather than our elected officials choosing us in accordance with their own interests. Fair maps are the spirit of our democracy. And though I currently live in Columbus and I'm glad I've given plenty of space to my my peers in Cleveland, this year's redistricting process has left so many young people, including myself, confused and discouraged that their voice will be heard and considered by this commission. The Ohio Redistricting Commission is asking Ohioans to provide their map, their input on the maps with no maps yet to be presented. What many of the folks today have pointed out is that this directly infringes on the Ohio bipartisan redistricting reforms that Ohio voters overwhelmingly voted to pass in 2015. You may also be wondering why I've chosen to testify here today, though I grew up here. What I'm wondering is why Ohio's largest urban area, Columbus, has been excluded from the state redistricting hearings. Columbus residents are forced to commute to Mansfield and Zanesville for their input on our state maps to be heard. And that excludes many, if not most, of our communities. Young folks represent a small minority in this room, but we are the ones who will for years to come suffer most the consequences of partisan and racial gerrymandering in Ohio. [Applause] I'll just finish up here. 2011's rigged maps have put extremist politicians in power. And they are hurting Ohio workers, families and students like me. Now is the time to restore democracy in Ohio and to restore young Ohioans faith in our democracy. Young peopl may be far and few in this room today, but they are watching and they will hold this commission accountable. I welcome any questions that you have for me today. And thank you for listening.

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [02:45:52] Thank you. Are there any questions? Is there anyone else that would like to speak? Come forward. Have you, in fact, completed a witness?

**Johnson** [02:46:13] No, but I will.

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [02:46:14] Thank you.

**Johnson** [02:46:17] Good afternoon. My name is Merle Johnson. I'm a member of the Ohio Board of Education, but I am not representing that organization. I am speaking for myself. I taught school in Cleveland for 40 years, and so whenever I speak, I always speak on behalf of students. We have students who are turning 18, and when they look out and see how elections are preplanned, how sometimes votes don't really make a difference because of the gerrymandering, then they get discouraged. We talk about why people

don't vote. If you keep seeing the same people getting elected and they're the same people who are putting out bad bills like House Bill 322 and 327, which would prohibit educators from teaching about race in the classroom under threat of losing their license and under threat of school districts losing their money. When you get people elected [Applause] when you have gerrymandering, then the people who develop those bills, those horrible, dangerous, abhorrent bills, they keep getting elected and it causes people not to want to come and speak against the bills because they say, why should I? They're going to get passed anyway. So when we talk about students who are turning 18, who really would like to have some hope that they can make a difference in this world and in this state, then it's important that you do the right thing, that you develop fair districts for the benefit of all of us. Thank you. [Applause]

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [02:48:08] Are there any questions at all?

**Johnson** [02:48:09] Any questions?

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [02:48:11] Thank you very much.

**Johnson** [02:48:12] Thank you.

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [02:48:15] Is there anyone else that would like to speak? Is there anyone else that would like to speak? Come forward, please.

**Jones** [02:48:40] Good afternoon. My name is Mittie Davis Jones and I am a retired professor, actually, here from Cleveland State University and glad that my status did allow me to be here today. So I just want to speak again, as others have, on behalf of fair districts in Ohio. Since the voting rights legislation was struck down, section 2, which requires review of congressional redistricting to ensure that they do not lead to discriminatory outcomes, I think it's incumbent upon those at the state level to take on that responsibility to do whatever needs to be done to ensure that the districts that are established do not have discriminatory impacts on people of color. The person earlier spoke about districts being designed to have a lot of African-American people, in particular, in one congressional district here, it happens to be District 11. So it needs to not be the case. The vote needs to be established in such a way as people can really have a bearing or an impact on the outcomes of the elections to ensure that their representation is not consolidated in one area. Also, I'd like to speak, as others have, about the opportunity for folks to come forward to speak before the commission. These hearings need to be held in places that are more accessible, because Cleveland State is just not an accessible place for various reasons. I mean, it is on a bus line, but for people who are driving, who need to park and things of that nature, it's really not an accessible environment. And lastly, I'd just like to say that I appreciate the fact that these hearings are being held, but I think the time line needs to be expanded so that more people can participate. The time frame in which these hearings are being scheduled is very limited. And a lot of people in the community are not aware, barely aware, of redistricting and/or gerrymandering. But, you know, having the opportunity to speak and come forward, I think is very important. But having said that, I applaud you on being here, taking this out to the people, but please expand upon that. Thank you very much. [Applause]

**State Senator Vernon Sykes** [02:51:04] We'd like to thank everyone for attending here today, those that present particularly. We'd like to say that the commission members, all of the commission members, are sworn in separately and apart from their original legislative and administrative responsibilities, to comply with the law, the letter and the spirit of the

law to adopt fair districts here in the state of Ohio. We have new guidelines and we intend to ensure that we follow the new guidelines to adopt fair districts in Ohio. Again, thank you. I want to thank the university for hosting us here today. The website, we'll continue to work on it to make available to you, all of the information that that is needed. Thank you very much.