

Testimony Presented to the Ohio Redistricting Commission
August 23, 2021 at Cleveland State University
By Susan Kaeser, Cleveland Heights

Commission leaders Cupp and Huffman, and members of the Ohio Redistricting 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 this process unfolds.

My name is Susie Kaeser. I have lived in Cleveland Heights for the last 41 years and I'm very proud of its strengths as a community whose residents are 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 our community value this diversity and are responsive to issues that drive the very survival of this kind of community. We are counting on you to consider our situation.

In our representative form of government three things seem to me to be essential: a high quality system of public education that is available to all and prepares our youth for 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 and should not be partisan. The way the legislature shapes these three features of a functioning democracy makes the definition of districts so important.

We are looking to you to respond to the will of 71% of voters who approved the amendment that calls 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% 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 legislature consistently makes them a step-child 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 the only one 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.