

Bill Lavezzi and Donna Stevens, Co-Chairs, Southeast League of Women Voters
Statement to the Ohio Redistricting Commission – Cleveland State University, 8/23/2021

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony in lieu of an in-person appearance.

We are honored to serve as co-chairs of the Southeast Chapter, the newest chapter of the Greater Cleveland League of Women Voters. We would like to tell you how the 2012 districting impacts our community.

The League's Southeast Chapter includes Bedford, Bedford Heights, Oakwood, and Walton Hills, which originated as parts of a single township. Between us we have just under 30,000 residents. We share a school district, two telephone exchanges, and a ZIP code. Residents of all four municipalities gather each year for Memorial Day and July Fourth parades, a Strawberry Festival, a Ribfest, weekly parties in the park, and other community festivals. From 2010 to 2020, as Cuyahoga County lost residents, our population held steady. But you wouldn't know all that from looking at our assignment to legislative districts.

The southeast communities of Cuyahoga County link the northern and western portions of House District 6, which winds from Broadview Heights to Gates Mills—over a 34-mile drive. Walton Hills and Oakwood—but not Bedford and Bedford Heights—provide a narrow land bridge between those two portions.

This means that during the past decade, our community has been split between the 6th and 12th Ohio House Districts and the 24th and 25th Senate Districts. And that break between Senate districts means that although our children attend the same school district, we fall into the 5th and 11th districts of the State Board of Education. We do not suggest that one district is somehow better than the other; we suggest simply that we should be together.

It would be absurd to suggest that the southeast communities were divided deliberately: we presume they were split to serve other districting needs. The current decennial redistricting offers a chance, and a challenge, to address the needs of our community. Despite different populations, economies, and governments, Bedford, Bedford Heights, Oakwood, and Walton Hills form a community of interest. Together, 30,000 residents can have an impact; divided, that impact is reduced. We respectfully request that the Redistricting Commission respect the integrity of our community when you draw the next decade's legislative district lines.