

Hello my name is Cynthia White from Bay Village, in Districts 9, 16 and 24. I would like to tell you about some of my experiences with re-districting. I was one of the many Fair Districts volunteers in 2017 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 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 on it and point out our most famous gerrymandered district, District 9, the “snake on the lake” stretching from Marcy Kapturs’ 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 they wanted their democracy to be fair. Some voters who identified as Republican were initially reluctant to sign, saying they knew the Republicans had an advantage and they liked it that way. When I pointed out that they were living in the “snake on the lake” and that it was a packed Democratic district which was not competitive for Republicans, they understood the negative impact of gerrymandering and most then 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 asked them.

My state representative’s 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. My state senate district 24 on the other hand is every bit as gerrymandered as my congressional district. It is U shaped, picking up wealthier suburbs around Cleveland along the western, southern and eastern borders of the county. It has not changed hands during the entire decade and can’t remain intact under the current rules.

I think the re-districting commission owes it to the citizens of Ohio to faithfully execute the intent of the amendments they have passed, and I hope you will do so. We will be watching and making sure that the public understands your work.