

**Ohio Redistricting Commission Regional Hearing Testimony
August 24, 2021 - Sinclair Community College**

Co-chairs Cupp and Sykes, members of the commission, thank you for this opportunity to testify today. My name is Stephen David, and I live in south Columbus in Ohio's 18th House District and 15th Senate District with my wife and two children.

I am a licensed social worker and much of my practice focuses on educating social work students and practitioners about the importance of voting and civic engagement. When I do this work encouraging health and human service professionals to incorporate nonpartisan voter outreach into their existing services, I like to focus on how voting is a healthy behavior. For individuals, civic engagement promotes a greater sense of life satisfaction and can act as a buffer against psychological distress like depression, and communities that vote tend to have greater access to services that promote overall health.

But despite what I think is a very convincing case for the benefits of political participation, we know that there is persistent disaffection with the process. National data shows that feeling your vote doesn't count, or doesn't really influence how decisions are made is among the top reasons for not voting. And when we look at our current district maps here in Ohio, who can blame people for feeling this way?

When I'm talking to young people and social workers, someone invariably asks the question, "But what about gerrymandering?" And I believe me, I have a slide about it, but to me the question itself is evidence that people know this is happening. People know it is wrong. And we need only look to the over seventy percent of voters who twice demanded a better map making process to know that people want this to change.

A great deal of time and debate has gone into the question of trust and integrity of our elections this year. I would contend that there is no greater evidence-based threat to the integrity of our electoral system than the practice of splitting apart and carving out neighborhoods in order to pre-determine the winners. Elections have integrity when political leaders are accountable to all of their voters, not just primary contests where candidates race as fast and far into partisan corners as possible, and then take these disconnected ideas back into the Statehouse.

So in the end, I guess I am asking you to help make my job a little easier. Make my case for the importance of voting a little stronger. Don't give my students and community partners such strong talking points about the political system ignoring them because spiraling, snaking maps break apart their neighborhood. Let's take away that doubt that so many Ohioans have that their votes don't count because the lines have been drawn to already pick the winner.

By deciding to draw fair maps this year, you all can send a message that what is important in the state of Ohio is not cementing partisan advantage for the next decade, but actually reflecting the will and responding to the interests of the people of this state.

Respectfully,



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