

Bylica Ohio Redistricting Commission Testimony – August 27, 2021

OSU- Mansfield 2:30 PM. Riedl rm 151. 1760 university dr.

Ohio Redistricting Commission:

I would like to propose that districts be redrawn in ways that make it easier for voters to meaningfully participate in democracy. Please redraw legislative districts in more geographically concise patterns in an equidistant fashion around public spaces where people can gather to deliberate, discuss and debate the issues of the day.. Please consider districts which roughly follow county lines or other existing jurisdictions.

I worked as a Reference Librarian for 8 years in a small town in Richland County. One of the most annoying questions that I would receive was: Who are my representatives? Then I looked at a map and saw that districts were drawn in ways that do not permit people to easily determine their legislative districts. Districts appeared to be long, narrow, windy, WHAT???? The way that lines are drawn are not very user-friendly, and this is detrimental to civic participation. Lines that are drawn in ways that grossly neglect easy recognition of districts by constituents has one horrible effect which cannot be overlooked: To exclude people from informed civic participation. Please fix this now by making the boundaries of legislative districts more logical to citizens.

Easily recognizable legislative districts which feature centrally located gathering places where people can meet for free is needed to start to remedy the dehumanization of online-only civic debates. I'm concerned that the predominance of Social Media as the "meeting place" for civic engagement is – in general -- making people forget about their common humanity as text-based conversations lack inflection and body language. In my personal life, I have learned that when a text-based communication with a friend, family member or boyfriend becomes heated, try to move it to voice. If it is still heated, move it to videoconferencing if possible or in person.

I'm afraid that when we interact with each other solely through devices, we can forget that we are actually interacting with other humans. When our civic engagement is relegated to "virtual spaces" because there are no clear physical places to meet because everyday citizens have no real clue as to the territory that their legislative districts cover, our civic engagement features heated debates within confines that lack one or more facets of human communication. When we forget that we are interacting with other humans, we can start to lose some of our humanity. When we forget our common humanity, we lose our common ground. This loss of common ground is sowing so many deep divisions in our country today that America's enemies can use to their advantage as the find a way to "Divide and conquer" - Us.

Let's not let them do that. Let's ensure there are common spaces to meet in the middle of newly redrawn legislative districts that our fellow citizens can easily recognize so they know who their fellow voters are. Let's make sure there are town halls, parks, stadiums, schools, or public libraries in the middle of these districts where people can meet for free for face-to-face conversation.

When I was working at the library, there was this older lady – Karen, I'll call her -- and this middle aged gentleman –Mark, I'll call him-- who would argue about politics and football over newspapers every single day. Even though this annoyed me at the time, I came to appreciate that those two did make good use of a publicly funded space for what they should be in a Democracy: Friendly debate. When Karen got too sick to come the library anymore, I heard that Mark would stop by her place every now and then to make sure that she was OK. THIS was friendly debate. When the time for debate was over, they were still friends. While there is no guarantee that simply creating legislative districts that have potential meeting places in the middle will help to repeat this experiment, I urge the Ohio Redistricting Commission to try.

Commission, you might want to turn a blind eye to things like: Rural, Urban, Suburban, Old, Young, White, Black, Republican, Democrat. Please care more about how well our democracy functions than who will win the next election.

Thank you,

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Lifelong citizen of Northern Ohio