

Committee Co-Chair Sykes and distinguished members of the Ohio Redistricting Committee. Thank for allowing me to submit my testimony advocating for the creation of fair legislative districts in the State of Ohio.

My name is Sharon Kokot. I am an Ohio voter, a life-long resident of Ohio, and a resident of Upper Arlington, a suburb of Columbus Ohio. I've come to Mansfield because there was no hearing scheduled in Columbus, although it is the capital, the largest city in the state, and one of the most heavily gerrymandered.

Living so close to Columbus, and as a citizen deeply concerned by the rapidly escalating gun violence in that city and in the state of Ohio, I'm down at the Statehouse a lot, attending committee hearings on gun sales and ownership. I am dismayed at the way our Republican legislators in those hearings completely disregard testimony by Ohio sheriffs, police and law enforcement organizations when they ask for common sense gun safety measures such as closing the loopholes on background checks. The "law and order" party does not need to respect the expertise of police. They do not need to seriously listen to testimony after testimony by other groups and individuals promoting universal background checks to save lives. They do not need to respect the wishes of 90% of Ohioans who favor universal background checks Why? Because they know their seats are safe. Because of gerrymandering, their party cannot be defeated in the next election, and as long as they represent extreme gun rights views, they won't even get primaried.

Why? Because gerrymandering brings together pockets of extremists from disparate parts of the state into a single district. This creates a voting block that elects legislators who represent those extremist views. Those legislators, though they be Republican in name, do not even support Republican governors, elected by statewide votes, because they are too moderate. After the mass shooting in Dayton, Ohioans called on Governor DeWine to "do something." And to his credit, he tried. He drew up a list of common sense measures aimed at protecting Ohio citizens from gun violence while protecting their Second Amendment rights. He soon learned that there was no way he could get these measures through the super-majority Republican General Assembly without watering down so much as to have very little impact. Republican Governor Kasich ran into the same resistance from legislators from his own party when he tried to address gun violence. Districts configured by corruption have allowed the Republican Party to be hijacked by extremists, and this is killing us — literally.

I'm using recent events within the Republican Party as examples, but the same would happen with any party with the nearly absolute power that gerrymandering confers. Currently, because of gerrymandering, there are far too many voices of all political persuasions that cannot be heard.

As you draw new compact, contiguous and balanced districts, please remember that you are serving the vast majority of Ohioans, and even your own political interests by acting upon the democratic principles that you were elected to serve. Thank you for

doing your utmost to preserve the spirit and the letter of the law to make Ohio the great state that it can be.

Please keep redistricting fair, transparent, non-discriminatory and politically impartial.

○We demand for the public to be heard. Please ensure everyone's voices are included in this process.

○Ask them to please keep your community together to create a better Ohio.

○Ask mapmakers to fulfill the promise of the redistricting reforms placed into the Ohio Constitution. The process should be transparent, open, and bipartisan. Maps should serve

the voters - not the political interests of parties or candidates.