

# **Ohio Redistricting Commission Testimony**

**Timothy O'Hanlon**

**August 27, 2021**

Speaker Cupp, Co-Chairman Sykes and members of the Commission,

Good afternoon. My name is Tim O'Hanlon. I live in the Fifth by Northwest area of Columbus, adjacent to the Village of Grandview Heights. My Ohio State Representative is Kristin Boggs (Dist. 18) and My Senator is Hearcel Craig (Distr. 15).

I am here today to speak on behalf of representational fairness in the redrawing of state legislative districts. As you know, the Ohio Redistricting Commission was created in 2015 by Constitutional Amendment approved by 71% of Ohio voters. The Amendments to Article XI, Section 6 of the Ohio Constitution specify that no legislative maps "shall" be drawn to favor one party over another. Section 6 also provides clear criteria for measuring representational fairness. It states, the Commission shall attempt to draw compact legislative districts that reflect the percentage of the votes won by the two parties in statewide elections held over the preceding ten years.

By that Constitutionally mandated standard, Ohio House and Senate legislative maps should reflect a 55% to 45% advantage for Republican candidates based on the results of those statewide elections. The current map of state legislative districts, by contrast, presents a blatant example of extreme gerrymandering with one party holding veto proof majorities in both houses. In the Ohio Senate, Republicans hold 25 seats, while the Democrats hold only 8, for a 75% to

25% advantage. Republicans also control 65% of the 99 seats in the Ohio House, for an advantage of 64 seats to 34.

As a consequence of gerrymandering, my own views, and frequently the views of a majority of Ohioans, are regularly ignored in favor of a vocal minority.

For example, in 2018, I spent many hours opposing an attempt to impose work requirements on poor, single Ohioans who were eligible for expanded Medicaid coverage under the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Ohio's proposal for a waiver to the ACA clearly indicated that it would deprive thousands of poor Ohioans health care coverage in the middle of an ongoing opioid crisis, while rural hospitals and clinics relied on expanded Medicaid to provide treatment and to stay afloat. The General Assembly ignored the pleas of medical professionals and continued to support work requirements, even though the federal government was still paying 100% of the cost of Medicaid expansion. The waiver was ultimately stopped by a court decision against a similar Kentucky proposal.

In August 2019, Governor DeWine responded to the mass shootings in Dayton by proposing some fairly modest gun control reforms. Polls taken at the time showed strong bi-partisan support for measures such as universal background checks, a ban on assault weapons and "red-flag" laws. The General Assembly's ultimate response to the popular will was to pass a "Stand Your Ground" law in December 2020.

Governor DeWine also received national acclaim for his handling of the COVID 19 pandemic in Ohio. Nevertheless, the General Assembly, once again spurred on by a vocal minority, approved measures allowing the legislature to reject or modify any state health order and health emergency issued by the Governor. The absence of a uniform policy on wearing masks in elementary

schools places children with no access to vaccines at significant risk from COVID's Delta variant. And now we have a House hearing on a bill to remove all vaccine mandates at a time when burned out nurses and teachers are leaving their professions in droves.

I am not in any way suggesting that in a representative democracy my views should always prevail. I don't think it unreasonable, however, that my views, and those of like-minded citizens, at least be given fair consideration.

Thus far, with a September 1 deadline looming, the Commission's opaque response to the long delay in the release of the 2020 Decennial Census data is far from comforting. I remain optimistic, however, that as conscientious officials elected by Ohio voters, you will act in their best interest by drawing state legislative maps in accordance with the mandates of the Constitution of Ohio.

Thank you.

Timothy P. O'Hanlon