

**TESTIMONY IN FAVOR OF FAIR MAPS AND TRANSPARENT
PROCESS SUBMITTED BY ANDREA R. YAGODA**

Co Chairs Sykes, Cupp and Members of the Commission, thank you for affording me the opportunity to address redistricting which sadly, has become synonymous with gerrymandering. In fact many people recognize the term “gerrymandering” and not “redistricting”. I know this because I was one of many who circulated petitions to reform our redistricting system and who worked daily at the Fair Districts office processing those petitions and knocked on doors reminding to Ohioans to vote for Issue 1. My name is Andrea Yagoda. I have been a resident of Ohio for 47 years. The last 43 of those years have been in the same location in Senate District 19, House District 67. My current Representatives in the General Assembly have been in office 11 and 13 years, respectively, having switched Houses after reaching their term limits so yes, those term limits have offered no relief for the lack of accountability of my representatives. Gerrymandering has had a dramatic impact on my life. When I first moved to my home I just wanted to enjoy the country in peace. But I got pulled into the community and became very active in efforts to limit development and prevent the construction of an upground reservoir. I even ran for public office. Involvement in local matters drew my attention to the statehouse. I began studying bills, writing my representatives, calling their offices, emailing them but got no response. Not once, not ever. I did however get blocked from my senator’s twitter feed. No acknowledgement other than an automated email and a voicemail which basically tells me that I should not expect a response. How can that be? I pay my taxes? These officials work for me? Gerrymandering. When your election is guaranteed you have the luxury of ignoring your constituents.

Calling my representatives is akin to trying to resolve a dispute and all you get every time you call is a recording and not a person. We all know how frustrating that is. So I stopped calling, emailing, writing. What was the point? I became apathetic. I withdrew from my community. Because of gerrymandering my vote was diluted and did not account for anything and even voting became an exercise in futility. Yes, at times we had candidates who ran against these representatives but they were merely names on the ballot.¹ I fully understand. Running a campaign takes a lot of time and money, a lot of personal sacrifice. But who wants to make that commitment when the results of the election are predetermined and the election is not competitive?

As time progressed I became angry. I was tired of taxation without representation. Politicians understand funding right? So I chose to vote against every levy on the ballot, whether it was schools, seniors, sheriff, fire, highways, etc. I chose, in anger, to vote against my community and in effect, myself. But I did not care. I encouraged others to do likewise rationalizing, for example, that if the schools were in dire straits financially, the General Assembly would have to address school funding.

Then that anger turned to fear as I read bill after bill being introduced. This drove me to activism. I volunteered as a poll worker, worked to get Ohioans registered to vote, volunteered to be a deputy for the Board of Elections to facilitate jail voting, assisted voters who were having problems with their absentee ballots. But that was not enough and it did not get me a voice in governance.

If I could not get my representatives to listen and acknowledge I exist, I would force other representatives to listen via testimony at committee hearings. I cannot force

¹ In 2018, 2020 we did see more than a name on the ballot but gerrymandering kept those candidates at bay.

anyone to hear what I am saying but I can take up their time and make them sit there and listen to my testimony and maybe someone watching will be swayed or educated. I had envisioned that committee hearings with constituent input would be an opportunity for robust exchanges of opinions and ideas. What I found was a group (not all) of politicians who made us feel unwanted, who were rude, disrespectful and made it clear they really did not want to hear what we had to say. These hearings were being conducted because they had to. Another exercise in futility. How can we be treated this way? How can a bill pass when hundreds of opposing testimony is submitted verses one proponent?

Gerrymandering. I watched sponsors of bills misrepresent what was contained in the bill. Either they had not even read the bill being sponsored or misunderstood it ² How can we be governed by outside groups who draft legislation not even being read/understood by its sponsors? Gerrymandering.

We need people policy not primary prevention policy, which is what gerrymandering has given us. Representatives focus more on avoiding primaries than what is best for the majority of Ohioans and what the majority has indicated they want.

² By way of example only In his testimony Representative Jordan incorrectly stated the following:

Current law says that an individual who is openly carrying a firearm without a license does not have to notify a law enforcement officer when they come into contact with one another in a regular encounter.

However, a person openly carrying a firearm is mandated to notify an officer if the individual simply possesses a concealed handgun license and could be charged with a crime for failing to do so. Ohio has had several instances in which otherwise law-abiding citizens are being charged for not notifying an officer quickly enough that they were exercising their Second Amendment rights.

Ohio Revised Code Section 2923.12 (B)(1) as currently written only requires a CHL holder to notify law enforcement if stopped for a lawful purpose and said person is carrying a **concealed handgun**. So contrary to his assertion, a CHL holder is **not** required to notify the officer if the weapon is in plain sight and thus is treated no differently than someone without a license who is carrying openly. And one of the sponsors of one of the Stand Your ground Bills justified the award of attorney fees against the state if the Defendant was successful at a pre trial immunity hearing and the statute made no provision for the same. It was only awarded when sued civilly by an individual.

70% of Ohioans agreed with me when they voted for redistricting reform for many of the same reasons.

I am tired of packing and cracking, tired of the closed doors deals, tired of having no voice, no influence, tired of having my vote diluted, tired of the lack of accountability by those who are supposed to represent us. All of us, their constituents, not just the radical bases. Please do not mistake being tired with apathy. I and so many others have worked too hard to even consider giving up now. I want every member of the Commission and the General Assembly to remember that Ohioans of all political persuasions voted to end gerrymandering. We voted for fair districts, compact and contiguous counties, transparency, citizen input and “representational fairness”. Democracy demands it. We demand it. We are all created equal and every vote should count and be treated equally. This is how a functioning Democracy works and all of us, as Americans, should want that.

Thank you.

Andrea R. Yagoda