

Redistricting Commission
Cleveland Hearing
September 13, 2021
Melissa Cropper

Good afternoon Co-chair Cupp, Co-chair Sykes, and members of the Redistricting Commission. I am Melissa Cropper, President of the Ohio Federation of Teachers and Secretary-Treasurer of the Ohio AFL-CIO. OFT represents approximately 20,000 active and retired teachers, faculty, paraprofessionals, support staff, and child care workers across the state. The Ohio AFL-CIO represents over 500,000 workers and retirees that help drive every industry and sector of Ohio's economy.

It's ridiculous that we need to be here today to weigh in on maps that are blatantly against the clear will of Ohio voters and in violation of the Ohio Constitution and the Voting Rights Act. We should be here discussing legitimate maps that comply with the law.

Our current maps are a travesty -- on average in Ohio, Republicans receive around 55% of the vote and Democrats receive around 45%. Yet, the current Ohio Senate is 75% Republican and the House is 65% Republican, because of gerrymandered districts that zig and zag throughout communities, cherry picking a favorable electorate for Republican candidates.

Ohio voters demanded better, and that's why we went to the polls in 2015 and 2018 to overwhelmingly approve constitutional amendments guaranteeing fair and compact districts that would elect a legislature that is actually representative of the preferences of Ohio voters.

Our constitution now **requires** districts that are drawn to "correspond closely to the statewide preferences of the voters of Ohio" and it **forbids** districts that are "drawn primarily to favor or disfavor a political party."

These maps, which would give Republicans almost 70% of all legislative seats, are clear violations of both the spirit and the letter of Ohio's constitution. These maps should be thrown out completely and replaced with proposals that would actually reflect the preferences of Ohio voters. Many of the other submissions to the redistricting commission met these clear guidelines, yet were not advanced by the majority on the commission.

In addition to violating the Ohio constitution, these maps are also in violation of the federal Voting Rights Act. Either through outright defiance, ignorance, or indifference, these maps were drawn without factoring in racial demographics. The claim that it is illegal to consider race is completely unfounded. In fact, race must be considered to ensure that maps don't divide communities of color leaving them without viable pathways toward representation. And that is exactly what these maps do.

These maps show unimaginable contempt for Ohio voters and for the law. In a year where we are already behind schedule in determining our districts, we do not have time to waste discussing maps that don't comply with the Ohio Constitution or federal laws.

What we need, and what voters demanded in '15 and '18 are fair maps that follow legal guidelines and a transparent process.

Fair maps means keeping our communities together, especially in Ohio's metro areas.

Fair maps means reflecting the partisan makeup of our state by allotting at least 44 Democratic leaning House districts and 15 Democratic Senate districts.

Fair maps means giving communities of color a real, viable pathway to representation. Fair maps means eliminating cracking and packing. Our constitution forbids packing one party's voters into 1 district when they should really anchor two neighboring districts and it forbids cracking up a party's voters to dilute their representation.

Fair maps will give all Ohio communities the voice that we deserve.

These are not just our preferences; this is what is required by law. Anything less is unconstitutional and unacceptable.