

Testimony for the Hearing on the Proposed General Assembly Maps

Cleveland, September 13, 2021

Commission members,

Thank you for your time. My name is Debbie Dalke, and I live in Bowling Green, in Wood County. Wood County now has too many people for one state house district, and so must be split. As I said at the Toledo hearing, if a community must be divided into multiple districts, the people who live there should have a voice in how this is done. I am here today to raise my voice.

The population issue with Wood County could be resolved by carving out a small segment and keeping Wood County largely intact. This is my preferred solution. The commission chose to accept the Huffman map, which divides Wood County in half. The western half of Wood County was lumped into a district with a piece of Lucas County and a slice of Hancock County. This district, District 43, would be my new house district. It is not compact, and it unnecessarily splits Hancock County. Hancock is small enough to be fully contained within a state house district.

The Huffman house map also isolates me from my community. I live about a mile southwest of the city limit, on the other side of the boundary that divides Wood County in two pieces. I have a Bowling Green zip code and I live in the Bowling Green school district. The vast majority of my business is conducted in Bowling Green and my husband pays Bowling Green city taxes. There is not a valid reason for putting me in a different house district.

I am also concerned about your redistricting process. Ray DiRossi, while introducing the Huffman maps to the commission (September 9th), said he was instructed by legislative leaders to draw maps without utilizing demographic or racial data. Mr. DiRossi also stated that the maps fully complied with the requirements in the Ohio constitution. I believe these two statements are contradictory, which I will explain.

Article XI, Section 6 of the Ohio Constitution states that a district plan should “correspond closely” to the statewide voting preferences over the previous 10 years. If, as Mr. DiRossi claims, voting patterns were not looked at when the maps were evaluated, then the map makers could not have adhered to this section of the constitution.

Article XI, Section 3 of the Ohio Constitution states that district plans should comply with federal law. A relevant federal law is the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Section 2 of this act prohibits policies that “deny or abridge” the right to vote based on race. A report that accompanies the 1982 extension of the act listed factors that might violate the act. Specifically mentioned was the creation of unusually large voting districts (<https://www.justice.gov/crt/section-2-voting-rights-act#sec2>). Mapmakers know they can minimize the voting power of a demographic group by packing a district with those individuals. If the Huffman maps were drawn, as claimed, without evaluating the racial composition of the districts, then we cannot know if some of the districts adversely impact people of color.

The League of Women Voters sponsored a map making competition using publicly available districting software. Dr. Christopher Cusack, an emeritus professor of geography, evaluated the maps for compactness, splitting of communities, correspondence of districts to voting patterns (proportionality), impact on minority representation, and competitiveness. The official Huffman were compared to the contest winners, and the Huffman maps ranked noticeably lower on compactness and proportionality. I’ve included a link to the video so you can view the analysis of your maps and hopefully, take the League’s superior maps under consideration. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wbqSCVZ3Gdk>

In conclusion, this redistricting process is a slap in the face to the 70% of Ohioans who voted for the redistricting reforms. The Republican engineered maps give even more power to Republican candidates, while claiming that voting patterns were not considered. Those maps are more politically biased than the ones we currently have. Private citizens were able to produce maps that better fit the constitutional criteria than your maps, and they did so in a more timely manner, and at no cost to the taxpayers.

David Winston, a redistricting consultant in the 1990's, said the following about his work: As a mapmaker, I can have more of an impact on an election than a campaign, more of an impact than a candidate. When I as a mapmaker have more of an impact than the voters, the system is out of whack." Cited in *Fight Club politics: How partisanship is poisoning the house of representative*, by Juliet Eilperin.

Your system IS out of whack. Please reject the proposed gerrymandered maps.

Thank you again.

Debbie Dalke

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