

OHIO REDISTRICTING COMMISSION TESTIMONY

AT CCE 9/13/21

Rep. Cupp, Sen. Sykes (co-chairs), and to all members of the Commission:

--1. I'm here today to comment on the proposed general assembly district plan, not as a Republican or as a Democrat, but as an advocate for voter participation. Such participation is essential to the health of our representative democracy. Simply put, gerrymandering stifles participation. Many will conclude that there is no point in participating, since their voice is not being heard. In our representative democracy, our voice is our vote. Again, many will conclude that there is no point in voting if their votes don't count. That is effectively the case where voting districts are gerrymandered.

--2. When I testified on the 23rd, and even when I provided supplemental testimony on August 27th, there was no map to analyze or discuss. Finally, on September 9th, the Senate President proposed a general assembly district plan. I was disheartened to see that, compared to the current maps, the proposed maps offered little or no improvement on the key criteria of proportionality and competitiveness, and even worse scores than before on the criterion of minority representation, based on scoring by Dave's Redistricting App. The nonpartisan Princeton Gerrymandering Project reached similar conclusions, including an overall grade of F (advantage to Republicans) and also a grade of F on the criterion of partisan fairness, for the proposed Ohio State House map.

However, I am encouraged that others have proposed maps that produce significant improvements on the key criteria previously mentioned, while still satisfying other requirements, such as contiguity, compliance with state and federal law, and equal population.

--3. My comments focus on proportionality and competitiveness, because those are tools available to improve representational fairness by fixing gerrymandering, and are either explicitly or implicitly made part of this Commission's tool kit in Ohio Constitution Article 11, Section 6. With a map that better reflects partisan voting patterns in our State--roughly 54% Republican and 46% Democratic--participation is more likely to rise. Similarly, with a map that contains more competitive districts, participation again is more likely to rise, as voters see political races in which their votes will count. That will produce better candidates and better ideas, critical elements of a robust representative democracy.

--4. One duty of legislators is to be responsive to the will of the people. When well over 2,000,000 Ohioans voted for the 2015 ballot initiative—over 71% of all votes cast—we sent you the strongest possible message that the current system was broken, and that, through a transparent, bipartisan process, we wanted you to create maps for the State House and Senate that better reflect who we are. Adoption of maps by purely partisan vote was not what Ohioans wanted, and was a procedure only to be used as a last resort. In the interest of voter participation, so essential to our representative democracy at its best, I urge you to reject a partisan result, and instead agree on one that is responsive to the will of over 71% of Ohio's voters.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Commission today.