

Testimony to the Ohio Redistricting Commission

Date: September 13, 2021
From: Maureen D. Welch
To: Co-Chairs Cupp and Sykes and members of the Ohio Redistricting Commission
Subject: Ohio Redistricting Commission "official working maps" and Medina County Ohio

Good afternoon, my name is Maureen Welch and I am a resident of Guilford Township in Medina County, presenting testimony as a general witness. I cannot be with you today due to health concerns and am disappointed I cannot testify virtually. I am a member of the League of Women Voters Greater Cleveland and a Fair Districts Coalition volunteer for their Speakers Bureau and Community Mapping, both of which have allowed me to listen and learn from Medina County residents. I have been interacting with Medina County citizens about redistricting reform since early 2016. Most recently I have been facilitating groups providing input for community maps in Medina County. Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts and concerns regarding the maps accepted by the Ohio Redistricting Commission as the "official working maps." It was alarming, but very telling to hear that the map makers were instructed by GOP legislative leadership to disregard the Voting Rights Act and proportionality as required in the Ohio State Constitution in drawing the district lines for their proposed map. It was not surprising that independent mapping experts quickly indicated that the map is not competitive and will ensure a Republican stronghold on the Ohio statehouse, even ensuring that Republicans pick up several more seats. The "official working map" on these grounds alone is unacceptable to the voters of Ohio who overwhelmingly supported the 2015 state redistricting reforms and we demand that you work with the minority members of the Ohio Redistricting Commission to develop fair, proportional, and competitive legislative maps. I also have concerns related to Medina County.

Even though there is no reason to split Medina County, on your "official working map" it is split yet again in a north/south manner and the western half of the Medina County is paired in a district with Ashland and NW Holmes County, with Wayne County conspicuously sitting between Medina and Holmes County. This does not benefit Medina voters and does not reflect where they spend most of their time. In 2021, while mapping where Medina countians live, work, shop, spend leisure time, and get their healthcare, NOT ONE person mentioned Ashland OR Holmes County as communities of interest or traveling there regularly for services or work. This is yet another attempt to gerrymander Medina voters placing us at a disadvantage when petitioning our legislative officials ensuring the continuing problem that voters do not know who their representative and senators are, and even worse, the offices of the representatives and senators are confused by the gerrymandered districts and don't know where their districts are. I know this firsthand because I have had to argue with my own legislators about whose district I'm in. That confusion is a diversion from public service and takes away from voters trying to work with legislators on issues and concerns. Gerrymandering is a way legislators turn their backs on voters and create apathy amongst the population.

I ask you to consider Geoff Wise' Ohio House and Senate maps. In these maps Medina County is whole and paired with Wayne and western Summit Counties, which makes total sense if you are trying to keep communities of like interests together. In talking with community members all over Medina County in

2021, people cited strong ties to Western Summit County for shopping, leisure, healthcare, services, and work as well as residents from Southern Medina County traveling to Wayne County for those very same reasons and for agricultural purposes. People all over the county consistently mentioned easy access to Interstates 76 and 71 and the ability to easily get to Fairlawn, Akron, and Cleveland. In Medina County we have infrastructure, environmental, and healthcare concerns (such as there is no hospital that delivers babies in Medina County) that are best addressed when we are kept whole and with like communities and are very clear who are legislators are.

Ohio voters spoke with their vote in 2015. We do not want to be packed and cracked into gerrymandered districts that dilute our votes and make the primaries the competitive race and the general election a “done deal,” even though the gerrymander is hidden in “false compactness.” Ohio voters expect and are asking the Ohio Redistricting Commission to follow the letter and the spirit of the redistricting reform passed in 2015. Ohioans spoke with their votes in 2015 and were clear, we want proportional districts and competitive districts that represent the population of Ohio and do not unfairly benefit one political party over another due to gerrymandering. Draw fair districts and let the chips fall where they may. Medina County wants to remain whole and be placed with communities that reflect where we spend our time and share our values. It is very clear that Geoff Wise’ maps for the House and Senate meet these standards – consider these maps as the “official working map” of the Ohio Redistricting Commission. It is time for the Ohio Redistricting Commission to reevaluate their course of foot dragging, apathy, and blatant noncompliance with the Ohio Constitution and federal law and pivot to passionate and hearty bipartisan work to do the will of Ohio voters in creating fair, competitive districts for Ohio. Anything less is a disservice to democracy and your oath of office. I thank you for your time and will persist in every way possible to push for fair districts in Ohio.