

Ohio Redistricting Commission Public Hearing Testimony
August 23, 2021
John A. Bocchieri

The Honorable Governor Mike Dewine
The Honorable Speaker of the House Robert Cupp
The Honorable Senate President Matt Huffman
The Honorable Senator Vernon Sykes
The Honorable House Minority Leader Emilia Sykes
The Honorable Keith Faber
The Honorable Frank LaRose

Members of the Ohio Redistricting Commission, thank you for bringing a public hearing to Mahoning County and performing your Constitutional duties in the open so we might have a discussion about the political future of this community.

I have served with all of you at some point over the last 21 years whether in the State Legislature or in our nation's Capital, and I've known all of you be honorable in your public service and its approach. We passed legislation together and worked together to help Ohioans after natural disasters and in their time of greatest need. I acknowledge your honorable service.

However, when it comes to campaigns, Ohioans acknowledge that the process which Legislative and Congressional districts are drawn, and have been drawn, demonstrate sheer political muscle versus fairness. Simply put, past maps have not been drawn as honorably as your individual service. Past commissions 'packed and cracked' communities like mine lumping vast numbers of voters into districts that do not follow the fairness model which comprises compactness, keeping cities whole and representational fairness.

It is clear in Ohio that politicians are picking the people they want to represent versus people picking the politicians they want representing them in government. It stems from this process which in the days of Governor Jim Rhodes and Speaker Vern Riffe saw maps drawn with pencils after much consensus, to maps that are now drawn with laser 3D printers to build from the ground up a political district for the majority party.

This process shouldn't be about politics, but about fairness. Don't get me wrong both Democrats and Republicans are doing it around the country – but Ohio hasn't witnessed fairness in decades.

When first elected to the Ohio House, the legislative map for the 57th District stretched from the suburbs of Youngstown to Carrollton, in Carrol County. In 2002 when the new map was redrawn, the 61st Ohio House District extended further south including slivers of Mahoning County, Stark County, all of Carrol County and a sliver of Tuscarawas County all the way to New

Congressional District that extended into Stark County. The district ultimately would be won by Congressman Tim Ryan however the majority conveniently drew my home in Alliance into his Congressional District attempting to pit us against each other. No other part of Stark County is in the 13th Congressional District.

My plea to you today is stop this madness. What I have learned by both winning and losing elections is that people want their elected representatives to reduce the political fighting and maximize their voices in our capital. This cannot be achieved when partisans draw districts that favor political gains instead of gaining influence for citizens of Ohio. The number of wave elections over the last 15 years is testimony in itself to citizens displeasure at this very process. Drawing districts where a politician just has to worry about winning their primary has reduced the effectiveness of our institutions. Sure it permits the majority to hold onto power, but it dilutes the discourse within these institutions and creates hyper-partisan rhetoric that weakens our ability to speak to each other.

Fairer district maps allow for consideration of opposing political views and the building of consensus, which is at the heart of our democracy. If we are truly about winning elections on ideas, then let our campaigns be about that instead of a predetermined map that was delivered to maximize political opportunities.

The data and the demographics support the premise that the Mahoning Valley deserves its own Congressional District and statehouse districts. Many of our citizens feel as if Columbus has forgotten about this region. You have the chance to demonstrate that fairer districts create fairer government for ALL of Ohio's citizens.

John Bocchieri is a former State Legislator serving in both the Ohio House of Representatives and the Ohio Senate. He served in the 111th Congress in Ohio's 16th Congressional District. Presently he is a pilot, First Officer for United Airlines in Cleveland aboard the Boeing 737 and is a Colonel and C-17 pilot in the Air Force Reserve.