

August 25, 2021

Zanesville, Ohio

Senator Sykes, Speaker Cupp, and Members of the Commission:

Good morning. My name is Pamela Conrad. I live in the 18th Ohio House district, the 15th Ohio Senate District, and the 15th Congressional District.

I would like to share my first-hand experience with how gerrymandering discourages people from voting.

For 50 years, I have volunteered on dozens of voter registration drives and get-out-the-vote efforts, for both partisan and non-partisan efforts. I have talked to voters at county fairs, beauty pageants, city parks, food banks, parades, festivals, rec centers, farmers' markets, and women's shelters. I have talked with hundreds – probably thousands – of Ohioans to encourage them to register and vote.

Too frequently, I encounter people who are eligible to vote but don't vote. They give a variety of reasons. But the single most depressing reason I hear is "I'm not going to vote because my vote doesn't matter here. I'm a Republican and this district is rigged for Democrats." Or, "I'm a Democrat and this district is rigged for Republicans. So why bother?" This reason for not voting is depressing to me, because it's the one reason I have no answer for. I can't refute their logic. Their district may, indeed, be rigged.

Districts drawn by favoritism are a toxic influence on voter participation. If people think their district is rigged, they may not vote in other races on the ballot, they may not vote at all, and they may not vote in the *next* election, either.

Then a vicious cycle begins: if Republicans stop voting in Democrat districts, and Democrats stop voting in Republican districts, then the voting statistics become skewed, and the district *looks even more* lopsided. Then good candidates stop filing to run for office. Then the quality of representation itself falls, even the quality of the representatives whose races are easy. It's a well-established fact that fair competition, in business or politics, helps raise product quality and customer satisfaction, and the lack of competition makes a company – or a legislature – mediocre, unpopular, out of touch with its constituents, and unresponsive.

Gerrymandering turns off voters. Nothing will erode our democracy faster than citizens believing their votes don't matter.

I ask you to be faithful to the Ohio Constitution and unselfishly draw fair and competitive districts, for the sake of our democracy.

Thank you.

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