Co-Chair Cupp, Co-Chair Sykes, and members of the Redistricting Commission, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Susan Haas, and I'm a resident of eastern Licking County. In 2017, I collected signatures for the Fair Districts ballot initiative. People from all walks of life signed my petitions. People who identified themselves as Republicans, Democrats, Independents and at least one Libertarian. Young, middle-aged and old; Black, white and Asian. People in business suits, biker leathers, tie-dye and work clothes. People whose hands, as they signed, showed manicured nails and expensive jewelry; people whose hands were rough and calloused from years of manual labor. Over 600 people who really had only one thing in common, besides being registered Ohio voters: they all wanted an end to gerrymandering.

I did most of my canvassing in the three counties nearest my home: Licking, Muskingum and Perry. Conservative counties, overall; strongly Republican-leaning, largely rural and working class. In both 2015 and 2018, these counties voted in favor of the anti-gerrymandering amendments by a margin of two to one. By a margin, in fact, larger than the margin of victory of any statewide official the following November. People want Fair Districts more than they want Gov. DeWine, Auditor Faber or Sec. LaRose.

Licking County is less gerrymandered than many, but we're split in two for the Ohio House. All the major population centers are drawn into District 71 – Newark, Heath, Pataskala, Granville, Johnstown, and the Licking County part of Reynoldsburg – while the remainder gets stuck onto Perry and Coshocton Counties to make District 72. The border between Licking and Coshocton County in District 72 is about seven miles long – there's just one State Route on which someone could drive within the district. The nearest population centers to any part of House District 72 in Licking County are Newark, in 71, and Zanesville, in 93.

Last year in Licking County, I saw two dramatically different Ohio House elections. District 71 has historically been represented by a moderate Republican, and the incumbent in 2020 had portrayed himself as a moderate as well. But the bitter, expensive and narrowly decided Republican primary became a contest of which candidate could espouse the most extreme positions.

By contrast, District 72, where I live, had been represented by an individual with an absolute lock on the district. It was common knowledge that there was no point to challenging him in a general election, unless something bizarre happened, like his getting arrested. So, when he actually did get arrested, there was no other candidate named on the ballot.

I worked on one of the write-in campaigns for House District 72 last year, and that's when another effect of gerrymandering became clear. Aside from a handful of neighbors, almost everyone I know well enough that I might have asked them to volunteer, lives in either District 71 or District 93. Recruiting volunteers was tough for all the write-in candidates, at least in part because of the shape of our patched-together district.

Now, not every district will be competitive for both major parties, no matter how the lines are drawn. But a healthy democracy depends on primary elections where candidates appeal to the broadest range of their party's supporters, and general elections that are a forum for ideas that could benefit all the district's residents. Districts where people with common interests share a common representative are what we voted for in 2015 and 2018, and that's what we demand now.

Thank you.