

Redistricting Testimony at Ohio University
Zanesville Campus center
Wednesday August 25, 2021

My name is Steve Kullman. I am a union member of the American Federation of State- County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 11- AFL-CIO. and I have lived in Muskingum County for 41 years. My Wife Jill and I have been married for 45 years and are active Foster Parents for 38 years. I have been employed by the State of Ohio- Department on Natural Resources for 43 years and I have served as a volunteer poll worker since 2006.

Ohioans believe in fair play. They are tired of powerful elected officials rigging the game in favor of themselves. That's why Ohio voters- across the political spectrum- passed two separate redistricting reform measures in 2015 and 2018 to ensure a more fair and transparent redistricting process. Legislators have a constitutional obligation to uphold the spirit of those reforms by drawing fair maps in an open and transparent process.

The most basic requirement of a true democracy is that citizens have the ability to choose their elected leaders by voting. Instead, gerrymandering allows politicians to choose their voters. Giving legislators' power over drawing their own districts and congressional maps creates a type of engineered chaos and conflict that turns democracy, courtesy, civility and decency on its head. Politicians should not accept gerrymandering as a means to redraw the sidelines because they want to step out of bounds to retain their power. By creating "safe" districts, gerrymandering increases partisanship. The elected official needs to only appeal to the narrow base and can ignore significant demographic portions of his or her district. And if the official dares to compromise, the party leaders can "primary" that elected official for being insufficiently partisan. Wouldn't it be better to have a process that incentivizes decent compromise and civility instead of bullying and rudeness? The end result of this gerrymandering leaves us with our voices muted, our rights watered down and our underserved communities and schools are left out and lacking of the services and opportunities that we pay our fair share of taxes to receive.

At our local level our school districts and many of our communities and urban areas are split between various state legislative and congressional districts. You all have the power to hold up the spirit of the amendments that we passed. Please do all you can to draw fair maps, reach common sense compromise, and show Ohioans real leadership.

In closing, we ask for fair districts and the ideals founded in our democracy. Thank you.