

**Deidra M Reese**  
**Testimony before the Ohio Redistricting Commission**  
**September 26, 2023**

Good Morning, My name is Deidra Reese, and I am the Statewide Program and Operations Director for the Ohio Unity Coalition and have long advocated for the participation of the general public in civic engagement. I am offering this testimony based upon my personal views and experience.

As I began to prepare my testimony before this commission, I truly struggled. As a person who works hard daily to engage citizens in advocacy, I am usually optimistic, but I am deeply concerned that we are going through an exercise where there is already a predetermined outcome that does not truly have the goal of avoiding advantaging one party over another. So, I wanted to share with you the Op Ed I wrote when this commission completed its last process in September 2021. Sadly, this process thus far makes me feel the same way.

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**Invisible, Ignored, Irrelevant.** That is what the majority members of the Ohio Redistricting Commission conveyed to the HUNDREDS of Ohio citizens who testified in person or through written testimony about the drawing of the lines for state legislative districts.

The constant refrains were simple) 1) Work together to draw maps that do not unfairly advantage one party over another, 2) be transparent in the process 3) follow the letter and intent of the voters who overwhelmingly passed the constitutional amendment and give us constitutional maps that uphold the U.S. Constitution and the Voting Rights Act, and 4) As much as possible keep communities together in ways that make sense.

Individual citizens, and those representing organizations, offered specific concerns as well as broad commentary on ways the maps and the process could be improved. Dozens of maps were submitted to the Commission for consideration using the criteria in Article 11, Section 6 of the Ohio Constitution. Some were even offered with underlying data and rationale.

And yet, voters who supported the redistricting process by margins of over 70% at the ballot box - rejecting the notion that we should have super-majorities representing us in our legislative bodies when we have voted for the past several decades at approximately 55-44% - were made to feel **Invisible, Ignored, and Irrelevant**. It was as if the legislative leaders had cooked the process from the beginning to maintain partisan control and had no intention of following the constitution and would in fact twist logic worse than the district that earned the title "gerrymander" to suit their purposes.

This was apparent by the comments made by the three executive appointees Governor DeWine, Auditor Faber and Secretary LaRose who indicated they were voting for the map under some level of hesitation or duress. Governor DeWine stated the map could be "more constitutional." LaRose expressed frustration that he had been asking "for days" for the Senate R's definitions/rationale of proportionality and that it was handed to him after the motion to adopt the map at 11:30pm on September 15. Faber praised the way the Senate Democratic caucus staff worked with him to share information and explain things when he asked because he did not have access from the other side. He also stated that he was relying in good faith on what the Republican caucus legal team told him regarding constitutionality because he had no further data to evaluate it himself.

While I am heartened that these three executive branch members were clearly indicating the flaws in the process, I am deeply disappointed that they still voted for the maps. I believe a vote is a choice not an obligation. If you believe it is not the best decision for the state, they could have voted not and forced a different outcome.

It is yet to be seen what will happen next, but what is clear is the citizens of Ohio who worked so hard to get the initiatives on the ballot, gather signatures, educate voters, get them to the polls and get them to pass these constitutional amendments, should not have been made to feel as if they did not matter. The lack of confidence that many have in our political and electoral system was intensified by what the Redistricting Commission did in this vote. As an advocate, and one who myself testified, I allowed myself to shed tears of hurt and anger, but today I have to take a deep breath and get ready to fight for fair congressional maps, praying that I will not walk away feeling **Invisible, Ignored, and Irrelevant** at the end of that process.

As of today, September 26, 2023, I urge the members of the Redistricting Commission to not only “do good enough, but to do the absolute best. Voters are counting on your expertise, your wisdom, and indeed your obligation to REPRESENT THEM in whatever capacity/role you hold as an elected official in this process. We, the citizens of Ohio, deserve nothing less.