

Good morning. My name is Jessica Epstein and I am here as a constituent from Tallmadge which is part of Ohio house district 36 and senate district 28. I was raised in Green and have lived in the 330 all my life. I am here today out of privilege because my career as an IT professional for an affordable housing developer has allowed me to be here on such short notice.

I'd like to tell a brief story about an experience my family had looking for affordable housing for my grandmother recently. My family quickly learned that someone on a fixed income making 30% of the area's median income is going to have a very difficult time finding affordable housing. Waitlists to get into LITHC housing like the kind my company provides are years long and the tax credits available for this housing is limited. At the same time we were desperately trying to find an affordable home for my grandmother, Senate President Matt Huffman was inserting components into the budget bill that would significantly increase property tax valuations for subsidized housing. Tax valuations that are needed to ensure the housing is affordable for people like my grandmother. In a discussion with my mom about this, through tears she asked "What are people supposed to do? Where is my mom supposed to live?" Call your senate and house representatives I said. I've told her this many times before but her response is always the same: "Phf, right what will that do? They won't listen" My mom is a lifelong republican who lives in Green. Her house district representative is a republican whose hometown is also Green. If she doesn't feel represented and hasn't for years, who does? No one. Because when we have gerrymandered districts, we don't have any checks and balances, our voting power is diluted, and we are left with unaccountable politicians running in uncompetitive elections who freely enact laws that don't serve ALL Ohioans. Now is the chance to draw new maps. Fair maps that will increase voter turnout, encourage bipartisanship and better ideas. Maps that show we can be a true democracy that represents the will of the people.

Senator Sykes, you said in a hearing earlier this week it is the commission's intention to adopt fair maps. I'd like to remind the commission that intention is not action and so far, we have seen little action. Action should have been taken months ago to convene this commission and host these hearings at times and locations that are accessible to working people. Front line workers like my husband who, as an educator, is unable to be here today, deserve to be represented in these public hearings, they deserve inclusive access to the ballot box, and they deserve to be represented in our districts. Every person that has shown up at these hearings is taking action to ensure maps are drawn that represent our communities. Some members of this commission could not be bothered to show up this week and hear what we have to say and that is unacceptable. I took action and showed up today because I am taking this redistricting process seriously. My question to the commission is, when will you?