

Blessing, Heather

From: Kyle Herman <kylescottherman@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, August 27, 2021 12:02 PM
To: Blessing, Heather; Testimony
Subject: Re: Witness Information Form for Akron Hearing

Thank you for allowing me to testify in-person today. Since I slightly abridged my remarks for the sake of time, I would also like to submit my written testimony for the record:

My name is Kyle Herman and I'm from Stow, OH, just northeast of Akron. I'm so glad that Ohioans passed constitutional amendments for nonpartisan districts that don't break up cities and counties so that we won't have these confusing maps in Summit County that make us feel detached from our representatives.

I'm a former high school history and civics teacher, and it's hard to teach when our system of government doesn't work the way it's supposed to in the textbooks or the way our Founders intended because of partisan gerrymandering.

Young people like my former students are disillusioned and giving up on democracy because our system is rigged. I'm a poll worker and I can testify that votes in Ohio are counted accurately, but that doesn't change the fact that our elections are already rigged by partisan gerrymandering. When the outcome is predetermined by a pre-selected voter pool, the whole process loses integrity.

I currently work on pro-democracy programs in Iraq and Lebanon for an international nonprofit, and I'm taking time off from my job to testify today. In my professional experience, I've seen how politicians in other countries learn from the United States to create their own rigged districts to maintain power, and this leads to further corruption and a lack of accountability.

Over the past decade, democracy has been backsliding globally, including here in the United States. The Economist's Global [Democracy Index](#) downgraded the United States from a "full democracy" to a "flawed democracy" and one of the major flaws is our gerrymandered districts. Similarly, [Freedom House](#) recently warned of a "crisis of confidence" in our system, with 55% of Americans seeing democracy as "weak," and one of the top concerns was "gerrymandering of legislative districts to protect parties."

Democracy professionals can't do our jobs providing assistance abroad if rigged maps here in Ohio make us a global laughingstock for failing to uphold democracy at home. Our veterans served in places like Iraq and Afghanistan in order to give them a fighting chance at democracy, and we do them and ourselves a disservice by undermining democracy with rigged maps. Rather than spread democracy abroad, we're putting ourselves at risk of losing democracy at home when so many votes are rendered meaningless that Ohioans, especially the next generation of young people, feel like it's pointless to participate. Fair maps in Ohio are essential to make us a shining city on a hill that other countries want to emulate, rather than as a blueprint for corruption or as an example of what NOT to do.

Ending gerrymandering is the first step toward more competitive elections and more accurate representation to restore faith in our system. Earlier this month, a candidate won a primary in a gerrymandered district with only 37% of the vote. Even though 63% voted against him, Ohio doesn't require a majority to win, and we don't have runoffs. Which leads, along with gerrymandering, to more extreme polarization. But Ohio could change that by following the example of Maine and Alaska by switching to Instant Runoff Elections, or Ranked Choice Voting. With Ranked Choice Voting, all districts could become more competitive because more candidates can

run when they don't have to worry about splitting votes or the spoiler effect. So when you're drawing the maps, please keep in mind that the political landscape can change over the next decade, so you might as well let voters actually determine the outcome, instead of drawing lines with the intention of limiting choices in order to install one party or the other.

I'm sure you're tired of hearing why gerrymandering is bad, but we wouldn't have to remind you if we could trust that you and your bosses would just do the right thing. Just a couple days ago, a party chair from one of Ohio's largest counties said the quiet part out loud that his party should "look out for" its own members and rig the maps because "voters value a spine." You know which voters really value a spine? The 70% of us who passed constitutional amendments to require fair, nonpartisan districts. So please earn our trust and follow the letter and the spirit of the law.

Thank you,
Kyle Herman

On Aug 24, 2021, at 11:55 PM, Kyle Herman <KyleScottHerman@gmail.com> wrote:

Thanks, Heather. Attached is the witness form so that I may be added to the list to speak.

Cheers,
Kyle

On Tue, Aug 24, 2021 at 11:49 PM Heather.Blessing@ohiohouse.gov <Heather.Blessing@ohiohouse.gov> wrote:

Mr. Herman:

You have the option of filling in the witness form on the website and emailing it to us in advance (we normally start with those witnesses first), or you can just show up, fill out one of the witness slips outside the room on the table, and give it to me or one of the other staff in advance.

Written testimony is not required; however you also have the option of just submitting written testimony if you prefer not to speak.

Sincerely,
Heather Blessing

On Aug 24, 2021, at 11:36 PM, Kyle Herman <kylescottherman@gmail.com> wrote:

Thanks, Heather. So do we just show up and stand in line or will there be a list?

On Tue, Aug 24, 2021 at 11:31 PM Heather.Blessing@ohiohouse.gov <Heather.Blessing@ohiohouse.gov> wrote:

Dear Mr. Herman:

No permission needed! All members of the public are welcome to attend and testify in person or in writing if they would like.

Sincerely,
Heather Blessing

> On Aug 24, 2021, at 10:51 PM, Kyle Herman
<kylescottherman@gmail.com> wrote:

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> Hello,

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> May I please testify at the Redistricting Commission hearing in Akron this
Friday?

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> My witness information form is attached.

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> Thank you,

> Kyle Herman

> <akron-witness-slip-kyle-herman.pdf>

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