

Renee Westermeyer (pronouns: she, her, hers)

Hearing: Sinclair Community College, Dayton

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Testimony regarding redistricting:

After moving from base to base as an Air Force Family, nine years ago we settled in Ohio because our kids called it home. Even though Ohio and the Dayton area has so much to offer, I sometimes regret our choice. In the relatively short time we have lived here, I have witnessed Ohio and its leadership slipping away from values that I and my family hold dear. The values of community, public health and safety along with protecting our environment, inclusivity and human rights. My testimony touches on a few points on how my family as well as countless other Ohioans are directly impacted by a lack of fair representation due to gerrymandering. According to OhioGOP.org, Ohio House and Senate seats are held by their party 64% and 75% respectively. Yet the voting public is nearly evenly split with 42% Republican leaning and 40% Democratⁱ. That leaves a large percentage of our population without fair or equal representation and no voice in our state's future.

I am a survivor of gun violence. My husband and I were robbed at gunpoint. He was pistol whipped and even though neither of us had lasting physical injuries, there were mental scars. My children have endured several school lockdowns due to active shooters on campus or near their schools and again there were mental scars. I had taken a group of out-of-town guests to Dayton's Oregon District earlier in the evening of the mass shooting. We all escaped without physical harm but again there were lasting mental scars and they fear coming back to visit. After the shooting, state officials promised to take action to keep us safer. Yet instead of passing a universal background check law that 90% of Ohioans favorⁱⁱ our unbalanced legislature voted to pass a "stand your ground" law instead that has shown to increase murder rates in states with these laws by up to 55%ⁱⁱⁱ and was strongly opposed by the majority of Ohioans as well as most law enforcement agencies. Recently my daughter was an eyewitness to a shooting close to OSU. Again, there were mental scars left for her and even though the victim was unarmed and nonthreatening, the shooter was not charged because of the stand your ground law and got away with attempted murder.

I am also a strong advocate for the LGBTQ+ community in our state. I have family members and numerous friends that identify on the spectrum. In the three plus years I volunteered as an ally for a local transgender support group, I have seen the devastating effects that discrimination can have on a person or a community. Lack of housing options, services both by the government and businesses as well as within or school systems and universities is a detriment to individuals and our state. Even though there are some federal protections for job discrimination and at school levels, there is much to be done in other areas. For example, if an LGBTQ+ person applied for housing within Dayton city limits they are protected from discrimination based on city laws like 35 other cities that have passed similar laws in Ohio. If that same person's application is rejected by a landlord based on orientation in Springboro or Centerville, they have little protections under current state law. For this reason, the Ohio Fairness Act has been introduced into the state House and Senate 10 times without even getting hearings until recently. This Act has support from 68%^{iv} of Ohioans, as well as most major businesses in our state but due to the inequality in representation, this Act has yet to pass and our citizens remain unprotected.

Our lopsided, unrepresentational maps protect those legislators that are not willing to listen to the 90% of us that want greater safety measures on gun violence or by the 68% of us that believe it is a human right to fair housing and services by making it nearly impossible to vote them out. This also effects our state economically since business, like Amazon, are reluctant to come here due to failure of our legislators to act on public safety and equality. All we as Ohioans are asking for is a fair fight for representation. Our voices to be heard. Our votes to count. I urge the committee to consider this within the map drawing process.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

ⁱ Party affiliation among adults in Ohio, Pew Research Center, pewforum.org

ⁱⁱ Poll Says 90% of Ohioans support gun background checks, WKYC staff, July 26, 2019

ⁱⁱⁱ The Effects of Stand your Ground Laws, RAND Corp, April 22, 2020

^{iv} A Turning Point: Ohio's efforts to enact LGBTQ non-discrimination laws, Lynna Lai, June 24, 2021