

Members of the Redistricting Commission:

Thank you for serving on this commission to draw new state and Congressional districts. You have a critically important role in securing our democracy.

I would have liked to testify in person but I am an immunocompromised person and without vaccine and face mask requirements I am at great risk of contracting covid and facing serious consequences including death. Hence I am submitting my testimony in writing. I was able to watch part of the testimony via the Ohio Channel live feed.

As you know, voters in all 88 counties have overwhelmingly approved the amendments to the Ohio Constitution to provide for a fair redistricting process.

Our democracy is “for the people, by the people”. That only happens if we have fair and open elections which includes fair districts. Your work is critical in ensuring that happens.

I live in Clermont County. Both my Congressional and State districts are heavily gerrymandered. Nearly all elections are effectively decided in the primary. In many cases, the primary election may have only 1 candidate - usually the incumbent - on the ballot.

In the 2020 elections, the eventual winners were effectively elected by as few as 9% of voters. This is because the General Election winner is the winner of the gerrymandered party primary. This is the percentage of voters who selected the primary candidate versus all the voters in the general election. In the case of the State Rep election, there was no incumbent so there was a contested primary. The winner of the primary did not even achieve a majority of all primary voters. In the Congressional and State Senator races, there was an incumbent running so they won the primary by an overwhelming margin. They effectively won the General Election races by 14 to 17%.

Please see the table below derived from information obtained from the Secretary of State website.

2020 Election Results	General Election voters	General Election winner percent	Primary election voters	Primary election winner percent	% primary/ general voters	Winners effective voter %
Congress	377211	61%	57000	94%	15%	14%
State Rep	67454	66%	14189	44%	21%	9%
State Senator	175431	73%	39206	76%	22%	17%
	Source:	Secretary of State website				

This scenario does not reflect “for the people, by the people” but rather “for the party in power” and is inexcusable.

As I noted, I was able to view some of the testimony via live stream. I would like to state my agreement with some of the points made:

- 1) Voters in Ohio overwhelmingly approved the Constitutional amendments for fair redistricting. This commission and the General Assembly MUST enact the voters' will for fair districts.
- 2) Ohio Congressional and General Assembly districts are currently overwhelmingly gerrymandered and do not reflect Ohio's makeup. One speaker noted that Ohio has the 2nd most gerrymandered districts in the US. Another noted that Ohio's districts are embarrassing.
- 3) Elected officials are not representative of public opinions. As noted by several of those giving testimony, there are numerous issues with overwhelming bipartisan public support but elected officials will not support the desired laws because of their fear of alienating their party base. One speaker noted that the maps are a better indication of both General Assembly and Congressional votes than the voice and will of the people.
- 4) Gerrymandering has led to election of extreme candidates who are pushing their own personal agendas instead of representing their voters. They can do this because the gerrymandered districts ensure their reelection.
- 5) The extreme geographical boundaries of current districts do not result in districts where there are common issues and concerns. The concerns of urban Cincinnati and rural Scioto county can be vastly different and are not fairly represented in the same Congressional district.
- 6) Candidates should win election because they have better ideas not because their party was more powerful in gerrymandering the election district.
- 7) Voters have been disenfranchised because they feel, and in many times rightly so, that their vote does not matter because the election winner is predetermined. Fair districts will reinvigorate citizen interest and improve our democratic government.
- 8) Transparency is required. The 2011 redistricting process likely violated Ohio's sunshine laws. That MUST not happen again. Mr. Pepper asked if there have been private meetings and discussions prior to the formation of the Commission this year. I would like to have that question answered also.
- 9) Beyond the items explicitly in the Constitutional amendments, what are the criteria for creating districts?
- 10) Some speakers noted that not all Commission members were present for the hearings. This is disturbing and gives the impression that the hearings do not matter and my testimony and that of the many others who testify will be ignored. That is unacceptable.
- 11) New districts should not be drawn to satisfy incumbency of current elected officials.

I would like to close with a couple points I did not hear from others during the time I watched.

The Constitutional amendment provides for 10 year maps only when bipartisan agreement is reached. There is a loop hole that allows for 4 year maps when there is no bipartisan agreement. Although some of the conditions that lead to gerrymandering are explicitly outlawed in the Constitution now, it certainly is possible to fashion maps which are still gerrymandered. These can be enacted as 4 years maps. THAT WOULD BE AN EXPLICIT REJECTION OF THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE EXPRESSED WHEN THEY ENACTED THE REDISTRICTING REFORMS AND IS TOTALLY UNACCEPTABLE.

Not directly part of the redistricting but worthy of consideration is the role of political parties. Political parties are not directly mentioned in either the US or Ohio Constitutions yet our entire election system revolves around them. The Republican and Democratic parties are monopolies and like all monopolies tend to work toward maintaining their power. Facilitating the inclusion of other parties and independents would help address the gerrymandering and fair districts issues. For instance, the number of petition signatures required to get onto the ballot for an independent candidate is far higher (and excessively so) than that required of a candidate aligned with a party. Independent candidates should not have a signature threshold which is greater than that of a candidate associated with a party.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my opinions regarding redistricting.

I and the 70+% of Ohio voters who approved the redistricting amendments not only expect but DEMAND that the process be followed as envisioned such that we have non-partisan 10 year maps.

Sincerely,

John Gray