

TESTIMONY AT OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY MANSFIELD - 08/27/21
In support of Fairly Drawn Community Districts Created in an Open and Transparent Process.

Members of the Commission, thank you for affording me this opportunity. My name is Meryl Neiman and I live in the Columbus area. Before I begin my substantive testimony, I must point out what a privilege it is to be here today. Most people don't have the luxury of being able to attend a hearing during the work day. Given that, and the rising Covid infection rates, I would suggest the Commission allow for virtual testimony to equalize and broaden participation in this process. I also must note that the lack of Commissioner attendance at these hearings thus far has been deeply disappointing. I hope going forward this community districting process will be more open and participatory.

Now for the substance of my testimony. No matter our color, background, or zip code, I think most of us can agree that voters should pick their leaders; leaders shouldn't pick their voters. Whether we're helping a neighbor schedule a vaccination, hosting a Buckeyes watch party, or planting a neighborhood garden, nobody knows our communities better than the people who live in them. That's why, every decade in association with the census, and in order to determine how we will be represented and how funds for schools, hospitals, and other services will be allocated, we come together to draw new district lines. These electoral maps are supposed to ensure each of our votes have equal weight, each of our voices are equally heard, and each of our communities receive equal government resources.

Or at least, that's what's *supposed* to happen. But ten years ago in Ohio, a handful of consultants met secretly on a weekly basis and carved up our neighborhoods into ridiculously shaped districts to serve the interests of the politicians who paid them, rather than our communities' needs. I'm here because this year we have the opportunity, indeed the obligation, to establish a stronger, fairer foundation for the next ten years. 2021 is the first time Ohio will be drawing maps using the new rules Ohioans demanded, and voted overwhelmingly to approve, in 2015 and 2018. These rules were designed to eliminate rigged electoral maps and replace them with a transparent process that allows the public to offer meaningful input, and in accordance with guide rails to ensure voting districts are drawn to keep communities together, rather than to divide and silence us for certain politicians' own personal and partisan benefit.

This is sort of an odd redistricting hearing in that the Commission isn't sharing any draft maps for us to review and comment on. Hopefully, this isn't a sign that the Commission is just going through the motions. But regardless of your intentions, even if some of you are meeting in secret and drafting district maps for your own or others' personal benefit, this time we have the law on our side, the Constitutional Amendments we passed with over 70 percent of the vote. And we will stay involved. We will be watching. If necessary, we will be on social media, we will be at the Statehouse, we will be at the Courthouse. We will do whatever we must to protect our freedom to vote, ensure all our voices are equally heard, and call out anyone who tries to impede that freedom or suppress those voices. We will

ensure that you follow the rules that are now engrafted in our state Constitution and give Ohio the community districts we deserve, and that will lay the foundation to build a stronger Ohio over the next ten years.

Thank you again. And I welcome any questions you may have.