

**PROPONENT TESTIMONY OF:
SHANNON M. FRESHOUR**

**IN SUPPORT OF:
FAIR MAPS
OHIO REDISTRICTING COMMISSION**

Marysville, Ohio, September 12, 2021 - I am submitting testimony in support of a fair redistricting process for the second time. The first time I pleaded for a process which allows voters' best interest to be the sole determining factor of our legislative maps.

Unfortunately, but absolutely predictably, the maps proposed by the Republicans on this Commission failed in every respect to meet the spirit of the State Constitution's mandate and to act in any form of good faith. It is clear that the plan is to give Ohioans an even more extremist, less representative state legislature for the next four years and then try to do it again for the rest of the decade.

There was no honest attempt to do the work of serving the public, only the continuation of the work of serving an unpopular, extremist agenda. One designed to win primaries that now act as general elections and, in the process, endanger the lives of all Ohioans by passing unconscionable laws against the majority of voters' demand.

This process is a perfect example of the problem.

Outraged by the unethical and potentially illegal antics of Ohio Republicans in 2011, that gave us the current maps, average Ohioans got angry and organized, demanding fair maps by develop in a bipartisan system and codifying it into the State Constitution.

Again, Ohio Republicans have with malice of forethought, ignored the intent and spirit of the process to make even more extremist maps, drawing themselves even more power, while continually minimizing the will of the voters.

I talked about corruption during my first testimony because it is a blight on our state and it is killing democracy, and it is a direct and foreseeable result of extreme gerrymandering.

Co-Chair Cupp only has his Speakers' gavel because the last Speaker, like a string of them before him,

had the FBI knock down his door and serve a criminal arrest warrant.

This time it was for a \$61,000,000 bribery scandal, that encompassed a well-organized criminal enterprise including tens of millions in illegally slushed funding, dark money to illegal entities masquerading as unaffiliated and largely unregulated state PACs. Those criminal slush funded PACs were used to attack Democratic candidates running for the State Legislature among other exploitations of the legislature and state government.

Criminality is woven into the state Republican election process at this point and horrifyingly embedded in our State government.

That's not hyperbolic, partisan spin, or outlandish, unsubstantiated allegations, but fact laid out in 1000s of pages of irrefutable evidence.

We voters do not get our voices heard when governance is treated as a game, and that game is rigged from the inside. We are simply pawns to be used and sacrificed to protect power.

Governor DeWine is finally showing interest in this Commission, or at least he did finally show up to the two hearings held with almost no public notice last Thursday. I am reminded he is the prime example of the real harm of extremist gerrymandering has not only on those directly disenfranchised, but to everyone living under it.

At the start of this extraordinarily lethal pandemic, he handled the reality in a principled and unpartisan way, governing in the best interest of the governed. Shorter, he did his damn job.

Of course, then the extremist majority in the State Legislature, ginned-up on hate, tribalism, vindictiveness, and arrogance, threatened all of our lives, again and again, proposing and passing more and more dangerous and ludicrous legislation. All the way to the current proposal to ban all vaccine mandates, from COVID to Measles to Smallpox simply to be seen as the most extreme to the most extreme of wing of primary voters.

Winning primaries has replaced, winning general elections to win seats.

Now, the Governor who worked to protect Ohioans' lives is sacrificing us to the extremist wing of his party hoping to fend off a primary challenge. We are simply pawns to be used and sacrificed to protect power.

The Governor who said in February while requesting \$50,000,000 for an ad campaign promoting our state, “[w]e want to position Ohio as the place to be...Ohio is a welcoming place. I don't care who you are, we want you to come to Ohio. It's a progressive state.”

What? We are what now? We cannot even get fair legislative districts that put our residents first. We cannot get background checks on gun sales that 90% of all Ohioans want, including 88% of rural residents and 87% of gun owners support.

We cannot get sane, safe, and scientifically based medical protections for women, for the LGBTQ+ communities, and for our children because an extreme minority has a stranglehold on the Republican primary process.

Commissioner and Democratic Leader in of the House Emilia Skyes responded best and most honestly to the Governor’s ad campaign request, “[i]nstead of spending \$50M for a PR campaign, Republicans could stop passing extremist legislation that keeps women, people of color, the LGBTQ community and working families from realizing their American dream in Ohio.. It would be a lot cheaper. And much more kind.”

We cannot become more kind, more progressive, and bring in the population growth needed to sustain our state’s importance if we continue the corrupt, criminal, and unconscionable extremist ideology destroying our state and poisoning our state’s image.

Like the rest of the nation, and the entire world, COVID is our most urgent concern, unlike many of those places we are not fighting it. Our state’s defense against COVID is worse than OSU’s was against Oregon yesterday.

Per the Dashboard today, the number of Ohioans who suffered a case serious enough to require hospitalization is 68,124. In real terms, that is every man, woman, and child, myself included, in my hometown of Marysville being hospitalized, as well as every person, including Speaker Cupp and President Huffman, in Lima, and all those who live in Columbiana hospitalized.

21,124 Ohioans have been killed by COVID and killed by our State’s leaders refusal to fight it with everything we have. That’s the equivalent of the entirety of Tiffin and Ross decimated, every adult and every child gone, plus dozens more.

Instead of working with our elected representatives to fight this pandemic, we are here trying to wrestle back power stolen through brazen malfeasance and an unprecedented level of duplicity.

Corruption, greed, craven power grabs, and extremist ideology led the Republicans on this committee to flagrantly disrespect and disregard the word, will, and spirit of Ohioans' desire to pick their leaders with these absurd maps.

Maps, that according to the designers, expressly did not include the Voting Rights Act requirements to ensure fair representation for all our citizens and ensuring that minority communities have pathways to gain their own voices in legislating. This outrage was done at the instruct of the Republican leadership on this committee.

These proposed maps are nearly impossible for me to discuss honestly. Under them, my county of Union, second fastest growing in the State, is merged with undefined parts of Franklin County. There is no clear indication which parts of Franklin and Columbus were merged with us. From the proposed Senate map, it is clear Dublin is merged but how far South does that go? Does it include Upper Arlington? Parts of Columbus proper? How far East? Are we combined with Worthington now? The proposed House map is even more ambiguous and ill-defined.

These proposed maps were designed to minimize and dilute Democratic voters' impact, not to get all Ohioans' fair maps centered on us being able to pick our desired representatives and punish with lost elections the ones who fail us and democracy.

These attempts to steal power, to codify disenfranchisement our those that do not support you by passing regressive and revolting voter suppression laws, are unconstitutional, undemocratic, and unAmerican.

In the end, they will not stand.

Thank you for your attention and consideration,

Shannon M. Freshour