

Written Testimony to the Ohio Redistricting Commission
Dayton Hearing, Sept.12, 2021
Ariel Miller, registered voter, Cincinnati, Ohio

Dear Speaker Cupp, Senator Sykes, and Members of the Ohio Redistricting Commission,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on your draft map of state legislative districts. I am writing to you as a diligent voter and a Christian whose religious values impel me to advocate for fair treatment for every citizen. That includes creating legislative districts that ensure that every citizen's vote counts equally. I celebrate the protections which voters have built into the Ohio Constitution through the redistricting rules they passed by landslide majorities.

The draft legislative maps presented by Senate President Matt Huffman and adopted by a party-line vote by your Commission are unconstitutional: they violate Ohio's constitutional requirement of representational fairness. Instead of creating districts that match the 55%-45% Republican-Democratic votes in Ohio general elections over the last decade, the proposed districts would create 66-68 likely Republican House districts out of 99.

In addition, initial review by members of Ohio's Equal Districts Coalition – which includes both faith-based and environmental non-profits with which I volunteer - shows that Sen. Huffman's districts dilute urban and minority voices. The Coalition cites specific examples of packing or cracking around Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, and Toledo.

I ask you to instead use the Unity Maps drawn by the Ohio Citizens Redistricting Commission as your draft, because these maps comply with all the requirements of the Ohio Constitution and meet the standards set by voters for a transparent mapmaking process that respects and incorporates citizen input.

I am calling out the complete lack of transparency and accountability of Sen. Hoffmann's maps. The only documentation provided on your website with his maps is the count of residents by district. By contrast, the Unity Maps unanimously adopted by the Ohio Citizens Redistricting Commission come with a report addressing how the maps comply with every requirement in the Constitution, such as representational fairness and keeping communities together.

Another injustice arises by your delay in scheduling hearings until the mapmaking process crashed into constitutional deadlines. Despite voters' letters and calls since early this year urging you, Governor DeWine, to appoint the Ohio Redistricting Commission so it could start taking public testimony, you postponed its start for months. When you finally swore in the members, the Commission held ten hearings in late August without providing any draft maps for public review, in marked contrast to the Ohio Citizens Redistricting Commission. Your hearings were announced with very little advance notice. They were held during business hours when many concerned voters could not take time off from work.

Using the Constitutionally-mandated deadlines and the delayed Census data as a justification, you have crammed the three required public hearings into three days starting Sunday, with only a few days' advance notice.

We are incredibly fortunate that the Ohio Citizens Redistricting Commission formed and carried out the work you should have launched this spring, Governor DeWine. Starting in May, they held public hearings throughout the state, in the evening, when working people could attend. These hearings drew almost 500 people in person, many representing large citizen groups. Commissioners and non-profit groups including the Ohio Council of Churches (which I work with closely as a lay leader in the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Ohio) held countless meetings by Zoom and in-person to explain the redistricting process to voters, and to equip them to submit hopes, concerns, and recommendations. Ohioans used a free web-based tool to submit 2,350 maps describing communities of interest at every level, from neighborhoods on up.

Not only did the Ohio Citizens Redistricting Commission collect this public input, but they used the Census data released on Aug. 12. Working with a research team at The Ohio State University, they analyzed districts both for representational fairness and compliance with the rules on ensuring that districts comply with the Constitutional rules on the allowable variation in population size.

The Commission then held two evening meetings, Aug. 26 and 27, to present the proposed maps to the public for feedback and questions. The Ohio Citizens Redistricting Commission submitted its proposed maps to the Ohio Redistricting Commission on Sept. 1, the first deadline set in the Ohio Constitution for publishing a draft map for the state's legislative districts.

You missed the deadline. You hadn't done the work. You are rushing through maps without furnishing the essential information Ohio citizens need to evaluate their compliance with the standards enshrined in our state Constitution.

Fortunately the Ohio Citizens Redistricting Commission has done the homework you should have begun months ago, through a transparent, accessible, and inclusive process that complies with the substance -- not just the letter -- of the reforms enacted by the voter referendum. Please honor the citizens you are sworn to serve by using the maps created by the OCRC as your basis for Ohio's new Senate and House districts.

Yours,
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