



TESTIMONY ON THE COMMISSION'S INTRODUCED STATE REDISTRICTING PLAN

Ohio Redistricting Commission
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Rev. Brandi Slaughter, JD
bslaughter@ohcouncilchs.org

Co-Chair Cupp, Co-Chair Sykes and members of the Government Oversight and Reform Committee, I am Rev. Brandi Slaughter. I serve as Policy Director for the Ohio Council of Churches. In partnership with 17 Christian denominations in 23 different organizational configurations, we represent the largest and most diverse group of Christians in Ohio, encompassing 4,000 congregations and nearly two-million members.

For over a hundred years, the Council has regarded sacred texts as motivation for the push for fairness and justice. I stand before you today as a partner in the fight to make sure that everyone is seen and heard, whether it be in the pews or in the community; in the census, at the polls, and throughout the redistricting process.

With over a decade of experience in and around Capitol Square, I have no idea why I thought this time it would be different. I travelled to the many of the hearings a few weeks ago. As a matter of habit, I always count the number of people of color I see in these proceedings. Because you see, as a woman of color, I take no joy in being the only or one of a few. As per usual, there was a sprinkling of us at the hearings. Perhaps it was because they were scheduled with short notice and during the work-day, or perhaps it is because the majority of the state legislature doesn't intrinsically value black lives, nor our votes. I stand today with bold prophetic witness because it is more than a feeling, it is evidenced in the GOP proposed maps. Without consideration for BIPOC communities, the GOP map is flawed from its inception and results in gerrymandered districts that ensure that the issues important to people of color never see the light of day.

I thought that, with the reforms to this process, that this time, we would get maps that recognize the human dignity of all people, one where black and brown people can anticipate adequate political representation. Instead the GOP maps are more of the same, actually worse. For the GOP leadership to have directed their map drawers to ignore something as fundamentally essential, never mind constitutionally required, as ensuring that Ohio's communities of color get the political representation they deserve is discouraging.

I cannot, in good faith, say that a redistricting plan meets constitutional muster, while also saying no thought was given to complying with the Voting Rights Act. The US Supreme Court holds that Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act – which says voting procedures, including the creation of new legislative districts, cannot dilute minority voting rights – as that would be a violation of Ohioans 14th amendment right to Equal Protection.

Packing and cracking of minority voters into districts is specifically designed to dilute minority voting strength and has been struck down in federal courts time and time again. The fact that the GOP map drawers admitted to not taking racial demographic data into account while drawing their map is extremely concerning, and a violation of Article 11 section 3(B)2, which states that any General Assembly map plan must comply with the US Constitution, the Ohio Constitution, AND federal law (i.e. the Voting Rights Act).

As a born again believer, an ordained elder in the Lord's church, having just celebrated 11 years of ministry in the Pentecostal Church of God in Christ denomination, I am obligated to stand with moral authority and condemn maps which will lock in another era of unfair and inequitable representation. My holy calling requires that I mirror the example of Jesus and that I stand in the gap to lift-up the most vulnerable, the marginalized, and black and brown people across Ohio. Let me be clear, the GOP maps fall short. How do you just ignore almost a quarter of Ohio's population? This commission needs to go back to the drawing board. I welcome any questions you may have.