

First, I would like to thank Co-chairs Cupp and Sykes, and the members of the Ohio Redistricting Commission for the opportunity to testify in support of Ohio's redistricting process and in the hopes that these community hearings result in the fair maps that Ohio voters need and deserve.

My name is Kelley Freeman, and I am the State Field Manager of NARAL Pro-Choice Ohio. I moved to Ohio from South Carolina in 2014 with the assumption that I was moving from a red state to a purple state and was very excited to get involved in a political process where I could feel like I was represented. It took a single lobby day, which felt like a crash course in Ohio politics, to find I was sorely mistaken in that assumption of purple statehood. But the thing is, I wasn't mistaken. Ohio is a purple state, with a split of 56/44 of Republican to Democrat votes in the last election. While the electorate in Ohio is a fairly balanced blend, the map absolutely doesn't reflect it.

If we want Ohio to be able to move forward and to be a state where people want to move to and raise their families - a decision I sometimes wonder whether was the right one for me - our future must include representational maps. Ohio is not yet losing population; it did lose a federal House seat. We aren't growing as fast as other states, and I think it could be because of gerrymandered maps (and abortion bans; but that's another conversation - but is it really)?

Gerrymandering also has a nasty tendency to drive elections to the extremes. When the real competition is during the primary, we don't see the balance the communities would like. Instead we get the folks who can shout the loudest and be the most divisive because districts are drawn like that. ALL Republicans are grouped together, even if they're not from similar communities, and Democrats accept it because they get safe seats out of it as well. I would wager that at least a third of the Republicans in the Statehouse aren't specifically anti-abortion, but vote that way because they aren't given any other options in gerrymandered districts. Rather than addressing the needs of their constituents, anti-choice legislators have been implementing their own agenda. When primaries are the only competitive part of an election, it dilutes power of more centrist voters who may skip the primary entirely in favor of general elections, and they in turn find that their only options are candidates who were chosen by the most extreme elements of each political party. Gerrymandered maps are erasing where there was once was common ground between political parties. I don't think most of these legislators actually hold anti-abortion beliefs or convictions, but they do have fundraising goals and it's an easy target.

Gerrymandered maps that make it all that easier to use being anti-abortion as an extreme view to prove they're more conservative than the other Republican in the race.

We need fair districts because my neighborhood in downtown Columbus shouldn't be split in half. Since I moved to Columbus, I have lived at four addresses, all within six miles of each other, and I've lived in three different Statehouse districts. I do recognize that Republicans would still have the majority in both the House and Senate under a fair map, but either party holding 75% of the seats is absurd given the makeup of the Ohio electorate, and to suggest a map that makes it even more slanted in favor of the Republican party is frankly insulting. Ohio voters deserve, and democracy demands, representational maps. Voters must be able to choose their representatives, not the other way around. We deserve to have an actual voice in the Ohio legislature instead of screaming into the wind as we have the last ten years.

Regardless of this commission's personal beliefs on policy-based issues in this state, I hope you'll take into consideration that fair maps, districts drawn with community input, will represent Ohioans more equally and will be a benefit for all going forward. Thank you.