

Hello, my name is Caitlin Johnson. I'm the communications director for Policy Matters Ohio, a research institute based in Cleveland and Columbus. I'm here representing my organization which does research and analysis to provide policymakers with the best information possible so you can write laws that make Ohio a vibrant, healthy, and prosperous state – for all people who live here, no exceptions.

I'm also speaking today as an Ohioan whose family came here from Ireland in the 1920s in search of political freedom and economic opportunity. Today I live in Shaker Heights with my husband, son and stepchildren. I want Ohio to live up to the promise my grandparents came here for.

All Ohioans deserve the freedom to choose elected leaders who are accountable and accessible to we the people - no matter where we live or what we look like or what political party we support. That's fundamental to our American form of government. But today, certain political interests are rigging the rules to divide communities and minimize the power of Black and brown Ohioans – just so they can hang on to power and wealth.

Ohioans can see what is happening. When we don't believe the people elected to represent us care about our families, our communities, or our future, we'll lose faith in our government. In a state and in a nation intensely divided, the consequences of that are all too painfully clear. The members of the Redistricting Commission have a chance to show Ohioans that politicians aren't just concerned with keep their party in power or appeasing their donors – that you want us all to live in thriving state where we can make their voices heard.

Instead, what we've seen is the opposite. The maps approved by the commission along party lines make a mockery of constitutionally

mandated process voters approved and affirm the worst stereotypes about politicians.

Ohioans have suffered during the near decade of living in districts deliberately drawn to silence their voices. For example, Policy Matters recently released its “State of Working Ohio” report which measures the economy by how working people, not corporations are faring. We found that before COVID, Ohio’s wealthiest and highest-paid were capturing more and more of the wealth that all working Ohioans help create while employers held down wages for people in the middle those who are paid the least. Our research also found that before COVID, six of our state’s 10 most common jobs pay so little, that a family of three would need food assistance to make ends meet. Many of these same jobs are the ones we all called “essential” last year – like food servers, janitors, grocery store workers. And Ohio is not a safe place for our tiniest residents. The state’s 2019 infant mortality rate of 6.9% is high compared to those of other states – driven mostly the unconscionably high infant mortality rate for Black infants 14.3 deaths per 1,000 births in 2019.

In fact, over the past decade, we’ve underperformed the nation in nearly every metric that really matters: inequality, segregation, overdose rates, college affordability and completion, job creation, median income and more. This is not a coincidence. When politicians are more accountable to corporate donors and lobbyists than to the people they represent, they write rules that benefit corporate donors and lobbyists — not the people.

You’ve been presented with options that would create competitive districts, ensure Ohioans are more fully represented by their elected officials, and keep communities together. Concerned Ohioans have given up their spare time to draw their own maps and submit testimony. These are the maps and ideas you should pay most

attention to: Ohioans know our communities best. For example, as someone with Cleveland roots going back 100 years, I know it's disingenuous to draw districts that cut across the city east to west, as proposed in both the Republican House and Senate map. Anyone who lived here for even a short time understands that.

What especially concerns me is that the maps which you are now using as a working draft did not account for demographic or racial data, even though the Ohio Constitution and federal law require map drawers to consider whether Black and brown communities have real opportunities for political representation. But these maps, split up the predominantly Black neighborhoods on Cleveland's east side, combining them with the predominantly white neighborhoods on the west side – diluting the Black community's political power. So Cuyahoga County, where about one-third of residents are Black, would be unlikely to have even one Black state senator.

Both parties have abused the map drawing system in the past. But Ohioans have clearly spoken and said they want something new. I'm asking you as a voter, an Ohioan and a parent who hopes her children also put down roots here, to make our state a model of good governance. Carry out this process in good faith. Keep communities together. Show the nation that there is a better way to do this. In a time when Americans are more divided than ever, you have a chance to prove that it is possible for people with different ideologies and outlooks to come together for the good everyone. Thank you.