

My name is Laura Joseph. I'm an active member of the Licking County League of Women Voters. I reside in the 12<sup>th</sup> Congressional District, the 31<sup>st</sup> Ohio Senate District and the 71<sup>st</sup> Ohio House District. Fair representation and eliminating gerrymandering have been concerns of mine for many years.

The corrosive effects of gerrymandering, and allowing politicians to pick their constituents rather than the other way around, have been with us since early 1880s, when Senator Elbridge Gerry famously presided over a distorted district map resembling a salamander. But the practice has unfortunately endured into the present and its negative impacts sadly accentuated by sophisticated software and increased polarization. Those negative impacts are with us today in Ohio. They include:

- (1) **Distorted, non-compact districts** that make it awkward if not onerous for constituents and their representatives to meet, and to galvanize over shared communities of interest. Since the last redistricting exercise, my own congressional district, the 12<sup>th</sup>, has included portions of no fewer than seven counties, stretching from urban areas of Franklin County to very rural ones in Muskingum and Richland and resembling a sea-horse very much akin to Elbridge Gerry's salamander. Prior to that, however, it was a much more compact district comprised of portions of just three counties: Licking, Franklin and Delaware. Such a district shared similar characteristics as of being suburban or peri-urban, particularly the challenges and opportunities of rapid economic growth and social transitions. I believe my community would be better represented if our district were to be more compact and focused primarily on such interests.
  
- (2) **A lack of representational fairness** in elections that rely on congressional and state districts. Despite Ohio being roughly 45% Democratic and 55% Republican, Congressional districts drawn in 2011 virtually guarantee that 75% of those districts will go to Republicans and 25% to Democrats. My own district, the 12<sup>th</sup>, was far more competitive prior to the 2011 redistricting, forcing candidates to work hard to win over voters and to keep their support after the election. This is not the case today because of how the district lines have been strategically drawn. In situations such as this, only the primary race is competitive, giving rise to more extreme candidates, making compromise in policy making all the harder. Elected officials lack accountability to considerable numbers of their constituents, since their re-election does not rely on them, and creates a sense of disenfranchisement from voters whose voices are diluted by rigged districts. This leads to increased polarization and lack of trust in officials to work for the common good.

Happily, Ohioans voted overwhelmingly in 2015 and 2018, by over 70% and in all 88 counties, for redistricting reform that will curtail gerrymandering and its negative impacts on our democracy. The new laws provide guidance for drawing districts that are practical, building whenever possible on existing township and county lines and limiting splits of counties, as well as emphasizing compactness and contiguousness. They emphasize representational fairness, transparency in the process of drawing districts, bi-partisan buy-in to the process, and a commitment that districts shall not be drawn to favor or disfavor political parties. I believe these reforms will improve public discourse and governance both in my own districts and across Ohio.

Ladies and gentlemen, if the Redistricting Committee and the General Assembly follow the new laws, and commit to redistricting by both the letter AND THE SPIRIT of those laws, then the new state and congressional maps will lead to better governance. They will foster more competitive elections, more

positive interaction between elected officials and their constituents, better collaboration and policy-making, and restored faith in government to fairly represent and advocate for their constituents.

Thank you very much hearing my input.

Laura Joseph  
216 Sunrise Street  
Granville, Ohio 43023

[lojo300@hotmail.com](mailto:lojo300@hotmail.com)

(740) 328 5151