

A Citizen's View of the Ohio Redistricting
Commission's Proposed State Maps

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As a registered Ohio voter, who supported redistricting reforms in 2015 and 2018, I can only say that my hopes are dashed as I look at the proposed maps created in purely partisan fashion by the majority party. These actions make it plain that Republicans intend to preserve their corrupt supermajority in the statehouse at all costs. As you are well aware, the proposed maps were passed for consideration on a party-line vote with no input from Democrats in a map-drawing process utterly lacking the transparency that voters expect.

My objections to these maps are many. For one, compactness is said to measure how sprawling or oddly shaped a district is—such as the notorious “snake on the lake” or the “quacking duck” district, to mention only two of the most egregious examples. As you certainly know, compactness of electoral districts is now required by the Ohio Constitution. Nonetheless, on the Republican-drawn House map, district 18 is a textbook example of a shape that defies compactness, by all objective mathematical measurements. Other examples include several Columbus area districts.

How are commissioners not ashamed to flout the constitution of our state?

Republican mappers have openly stated that leadership instructed them to ignore demographic and racial data. How can this be when they are constitutionally obliged to assure that minority communities have genuine and sufficient access to political representation? It appears that commissioners have chosen to disregard his obligation. The proposed maps “crack and pack” our communities, in violation of the federal Voting Rights Act: they deliberately “pack” minorities into districts that limit voters’ clout. It is evident, for example, that House districts 24 and 25 display excessive population as well as large percentages of minority groups. While lines were carefully drawn to see that these surpluses would fall within the legally acceptable range, commissioners certainly realize that concentrating minorities into a small number of districts negatively impacts diversity in election outcomes.

Indeed, it is plain to the naked eye that as many as 66% of districts have been purposely drawn to favor Republicans and protect their incumbents. You are well aware that this does NOT reflect the actual makeup of our electorate. Statewide elections have shown that only 55% of Ohio voters typically supported Republicans. A truly fair map would demonstrate a 55-45 split among districts. In order to guarantee that districts aren’t manipulated for partisan advantage, the Ohio Constitution prohibits gerrymandering and establishes representational fairness. Rules in Article XI require that districts be proportional—i.e., fair in terms of representational outcomes. This means that the districts’ overall partisan makeup must reflect Ohio as a whole. Proportionality thereby prevents gerrymandering.

It is obvious to any observer that this entire process blatantly fails to meet the promise of the reform measures mandated by Ohio voters. As one citizen stated, whose testimony I viewed on video, you have performed a “charade,” decorated with “window-dressing,” to create a semblance of democratic procedures.

I myself attended the public hearing held in Toledo on August 26. Over several hours of testimony, not one person pleaded for maintenance of the status quo whereby Republicans grant themselves a supermajority for another decade. Not one person asked for the Voting Rights Act and the Ohio Constitution to be brushed aside. Not one person drove miles to the Toledo-Lucas County Public Library, mid-day and mid-week on short notice, hoping to be ignored and disrespected by commissioners who would produce maps no better than those of 2011 from the standpoint of fairness and democratic principles.

Nonetheless, here in the northwest, House map-drawers have molded a slice of rural Hancock County into one counterintuitive district with northwestern Toledo suburbs such as Sylvania, leaving the contiguous suburbs of Holland and Maumee packed in with Ottawa County. Did a single citizen-submitted map recommend this odd configuration? I sincerely doubt it, but since I also doubt that commissioners bothered to view most, if not all, of the citizens’ maps, I guess it should come as no surprise that you went with your own preferences rather than ours.

If you expect to be regarded as public servants worthy of the name, you must stand for democracy. You must return to the drawing board and honor the spirit of our constitutional reforms.