

September 12, 2021

To the Co-Chairs of the Ohio Redistricting Commission

The cities of Upper Arlington, Grandview Heights and the Village of Marble Cliff make up what is commonly known as the Tri-Village area. This name is not an accident, as these communities share similar urban features, history, demographics and a strong sense of identity. One of the critical aspects of drawing fair maps is to cluster adjacent communities that have a common interest. The three communities share a strong common bond, yet it is if the community was completely ignored when the current maps were drawn after the 2010 census.

Over the past 31 years I have lived, worked and owned property in Upper Arlington. After reviewing the current maps it is quite obvious the Tri-Village area's congressional, state senate and house districts have been drawn to either split our community into multiple districts (Ohio's house and senate districts) or dilute the representation of the Tri-Village area by merging it with counties outside the Columbus metropolitan area that have little or no common interest with our community (the 15th Congressional District).

These three examples show how the 2011 maps have failed to maintain the integrity of the Tri-Village community. Here are a few more details.

15th Congressional District (Dilutes the representation of the Tri-Village communities)

While the 15th Congressional district keeps the Tri-Village communities of Upper Arlington, Grandview Heights and Marble Cliff together, the boundary veers off to the west, south and east to include 11 other counties and communities with very different needs when compared with the three inner ring suburban communities. How do you represent the very different concerns of a resident of Grandview Heights to the needs of a resident of McArthur in Vinton County? These lines were drawn to dilute the influence of urban suburbs located on the west side of Columbus.

What happens when a candidate runs in the current 15th Congressional district? How does he or she realistically campaign in meet the real needs of an Upper Arlington suburban resident compared with the very different requirements of a farmer in Perry County? This is not a fair way to draw our districts. In fact, it's a setup for certain interests to maintain power by manipulating critical boundaries.

Ohio State Senate (Splits Tri-Village into three separate districts)

Instead of diluting the interests of the Tri-Village communities, as shown in the 15th congressional district, the Ohio senate maps do the opposite by splitting them into three separate districts (3, 15 and 16). Either way, the results have a similar effect by reducing our ability to work effectively with our representative as a cohesive community of interest.

Ohio State House (Splits the Tri-Village into three separate districts)

The Ohio house districts follow the same pattern of the senate by dividing the Tri-Village communities into three separate districts (17, 18 and 24).

What Needs to Happen Now

Over the years I have seen how dysfunctional and polarized our legislative process has become at both the state and federal level. And I believe that part of this dysfunction has to do with the partisan ways our districts have been drawn to distort our representative government. With the passage of new redistricting laws in 2015 and 2018 it is my fervent hope that we can come to a place where voters can choose our politicians, not the other way around.

I am appealing to the members of the Redistricting Commission to hear our concerns and the concerns of other communities throughout the State of Ohio and redraw these maps in a fair and equitable way that allows all our voices to be clearly heard by our elected representatives. Please don't ignore our call. Our democracy depends on it.

Jay Zenitsky
Upper Arlington, Ohio