

Deidra M Reese,  
Columbus Ohio Coordinator  
Ohio Unity Coalition  
6457 Albany Pond  
New Albany, Ohio 43054  
614-563-0549

My name is Deidra Reese, this testimony is offered on behalf of the Ohio Coalition on Black Civic Participation/Ohio Unity Coalition regarding the Ohio Redistricting Process.

It is our belief that Democracy is a fundamental cornerstone of America. Though we are still a nation seeking to be a more perfect union, we were built on solid ideals of freedom, liberty, and the concept of true representation.

Ohio voters spoke loudly when they passed not one but two constitutional amendments changing the way district lines are drawn for legislative and congressional district maps. While no process is perfect, the new process offers a great improvement of the past process for drawing district lines by two major elements. 1) Keeping communities together and 2) requiring bipartisan support of maps.

The OCBCP/Ohio Unity Coalition engages in black voter participation in elections with the goal of electing candidates who will best represent their interests, however; if politicians are able to select their voters through gerrymandered districts based on partisan criteria, it undercuts the true purpose of our voting process.

We are aware that Ohio will lose one congressional seat due to the 2020 Census, and we are particularly sensitive to the lack of representation of people of color in our legislative bodies. Currently, there is only one majority minority district in Ohio, and only two districts represented by people of color in the United State's Congress from Ohio. In the Ohio General Assembly there are 20. This is a representation of 12.5% and 15% representation, respectively. According to the 2020 Census, the Ohio minority population is 24% including African American, Hispanic, Asian Pacific Islander and Native Americans.

While the current minority representation of the population is underrepresented in the General Assembly by 6% and 9% in the Congress, this is an opportunity to consider districts that reflect the true population of the people who live in the districts, as well as the issues and concerns that bind them together by their experiences. Race, ethnicity, economic status, and educational attainment are often factors that are similar enough to require a voice that will represent a unique and needed view in the halls of government.

The United States Supreme Court does not allow race as *the primary* basis for the drawing of legislative districts, however; it does allow consideration of race as *a criterion*, along with other issues of common interest. In a season of significant racial and economic disconnect and division, it is imperative that there be voices to raise issues and voice concerns of a significant portion of the citizens of the state of Ohio. It is my sincere hope that as the Commission conducts its work, that there is consideration for at least one majority-minority congressional district in our state.

There have been very spirited discussions and issues that have centered on sensitive historical and current racial dynamics that require a voice in policy debate and discussion, but more importantly

decision-making. As this body deliberates the redistricting of our state, please do not adopt a color-blind approach that ignores the complex experiences that are at times unique to the racial diversity of our state and should be represented in our halls of government. The new system affords you the structure to meet this request and I hope that you will provide that fair opportunity, because until we are color-blind in outcomes, we cannot ignore that we are not yet color-blind in opportunities, some of which are still tied to race, class and geography. Our diversity should be embraced so that we can all benefit from our differences and learn what we share in common.

As we talk about representational fairness, partisan fairness cannot be the only prism considered. Communities of color also deserve representational fairness that has been grossly lacking in our political discourse. While I am keenly aware that the concept of "minority opportunity districts", in the maps that I have seen thus far, opportunity often does not translate from potential to reality. I ask that this body be deliberate in its action to assure the ability for communities of color to truly impact and influence the outcome of elections, and more importantly those who will ultimately represent them in the congress, and the state legislature. Those current levels of underrepresentation of 6% in the General Assembly and 9% in the Congress are out of step with our diversifying population. I implore you to take this opportunity, using the Supreme court approved policy to use racial data as one of your criteria considered as you draw the new maps. I hope this information is not new to you as this testimony was submitted to this body in written form for the Zanesville hearing.

In closing, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to share this testimony and wish you much success in this tight timeframe to create fair and equitable districts that gain bi-partisan support.

Sincerely,

Deidra M. Reese, Columbus Coordinator

Ohio Unity Coalition