

I am a lifelong resident of Mahoning County, Ohio, and the Chair of the Voter Services Committee of the League of Women Voters of Greater Youngstown. The League looks forward to a redistricting process that establishes districts which support a robust democracy, rather than districts which ensure political prominence of one political party over others. Districts that include communities with common interests, and are geographically compact, regardless of the political philosophies of the voters who live in those districts, are districts that lead to competitive elections AND accountability of elected officials to their constituents.

Mahoning County, by any definition, is a geographically compact area that consists of communities of common interests. As one of many examples, we share the wonderful higher education resource that is hosting this public hearing. Yet, since the redistricting of 2000, Mahoning County has been divided into two congressional districts, making advocacy for what is best for our ENTIRE community difficult. Our battles should be over HOW our elected officials promote the interests of this region, and that is best done when the county is included in one district. I understand the Redistricting Commission does not have a primary role in establishing Congressional Districts, but you will have a role if the Ohio General Assembly fails to approve new maps according to the established rules.

Finally, I would like to emphasize the importance of the Commission adhering to the guidance about “representational fairness.” As you know, this states that the newly drawn state senate and state representative districts, in the aggregate, must roughly correspond to the statewide preferences of Ohio voters over the last 10 years as expressed in statewide and federal partisan general elections. Looking at just a couple of these examples, former President Trump won Ohio in 2020 by a margin of 53 – 45. Is Ohio a “53% Republican – 45% Democrat” state? Governor DeWine won the governorship in 2018 by a margin of 50 - 47. Is Ohio a “50% Republican – 47% Democrat” state? Whatever we are, we are not a 76 % Republican – 24% Democrat state, which is the current configuration of the Ohio Senate. We are not a 65% Republican - 35% Democrat state, which is the current configuration of the Ohio General Assembly.

In 2015 and 2018 voters overwhelmingly supported new rules for establishing districts that are intended to make elected officials responsive to their constituents, rather than districts that favor one political party over others. The LWVGY, and I personally, expect those of you responsible for enacting the 2015 and 2018 reforms do so according to the spirit of these reforms.

Kathleen Chaffee Gaige

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