

My name is Caroline Cook. I live in Newark, Ohio.

First, I would like to thank the members of the Commission for the opportunity to testify today. Having tried to draw a redistricting map, I appreciate the difficult task you have before you. As a retired teacher who has taught American history and Civics, I am committed to the democratic process. I believe that our nation is best governed when we have the active involvement of informed citizens and voters have faith that their vote counts. Citizens want to be assured that their representatives are aware of their concerns and are working together to find solutions to their problems.

Although I am wearing a Poor People's Campaign shirt today and am the Central Ohio Chair, I also belong to several other organizations including the League of Women Voters and participated in getting the signatures to put fair districting on the ballot. The majority of Ohio voters, 71%, clearly demanded an end to gerrymandering and increased transparency in the once every 10 year process of drawing the maps. The citizens of Ohio are counting on you to draw fair maps, to avoid cracking and packing along party lines, to create compact and orderly districts (no snakes or ducks), and to consider areas of interest that need to be represented.

As a teacher, I had to explain gerrymandering to my students, and it was difficult for them to understand. Once they did, these idealistic soon to be voters, were angry about the manipulation that took place by party leaders, often out of sight. Partisan manipulation discourages citizens from becoming part of the democratic process. Why vote if you are a Republican in a district gerrymandered to always elect a Democrat or a Democrat in a district gerrymandered to elect a Republican? Gerrymandering brings out the worst in both parties. It increases partisanship and encourages representatives to campaign on extreme partisan issues instead of truly representing local and regional needs that most often cross party lines. A good example is the need of smaller cities and rural areas for public transportation to the larger cities like Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, etc. The city I live in, Newark has no public transportation to Columbus and that is where major healthcare facilities are located as well as some of the better paying jobs. When districts are drawn to create shapes like House district 71 and Senate district 31 (my districts) it makes it impossible for our elected officials to focus on regional issues like public transportation in more rural areas because the districts are not compact and the constituents do not have the same concerns or point of view.

I trust that you care as much as I do about keeping our democracy healthy and encouraging our citizens to vote and express their needs to their representatives. A healthy democracy requires citizens to trust their leaders to be open and honest, not manipulating the maps. We need competitive districts where voters believe that their candidate has a chance of winning the election if they have proposed good policies that meet the needs of constituents. Ohio is not a partisan state. We have one senator from each party. We chose President Obama and President Trump. Elections are close in Ohio, but our Ohio legislature does not represent the state with both houses currently having large Republican majorities. This is only my opinion, but in the past year we have seen measures proposed that can only be described as pandering to the most extreme views of the Republican party. The more moderate voices in both parties have been left on the sidelines and cooperation and compromise has been lost. We need to get this back through making our representatives accountable to voters and that can only take place if we have fair district maps.

Thank your for listening!

