

TESTIMONY
Ohio Redistricting Commission
Testimony of Mindy D. Hedges, Private Citizen

Co Chairs Senator Sykes and House Speaker Cupp, and members of the newly formed Ohio Redistricting Commission Governor Mike DeWine, House Minority Leader Emilia Sykes, Secretary of State Frank LaRose, Senate President Matt Huffman, and Auditor Keith Faber, thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Mindy Hedges.

I have always been an unusual addition to my rural area. I'm like a Green Acres story. New Yorker marries Ohio farmer living in a very rural Ohio area in a rapidly growing, very wealthy Ohio County. Sounds like a possible start to a new TV show.

But there are grave issues here, just like there are around our State, because of how we are districted. My area is governed by those who are concerned with money and major population growth areas; not farming communities. They don't understand, nor do they consider when they vote, any issues the rural areas have or how the residents are going through the many changes in our economic and social culture. Consideration has not been given to problems in our area like internet services, which are very spotty and inconsistent, or emergency services, or aid for seniors living alone or potential lack of water sources or farm subsidies during Covid, or varied electric services, just to name a few.

We are isolated in our area, just as we are isolated from our representation. We don't feel as if we have any representation because our district is so gerrymandered. It appears as if both our Ohio House and Senate representatives are more concerned with how much money they can collect for their next election; not what their constituents want or need. They don't meet with us. They don't communicate with us. They turn down requests for town halls. They are no longer elected by their constituents, but rather **they** have selected their constituents in such a way that they know they will never lose.

That is not the way Democracy is supposed to work. That does not help the entire district, but rather benefits our wealthier and more populated areas. Most of Ohio's districts were artfully designed in the same manner. They no longer have to be competitive, nor compliant, to their constituents, nor serve the people of their districts. They are mutually inclusive to the representative's needs and not the citizens of their communities.

Years ago, not many average Ohioans knew what gerrymandering was or thought much about the redistricting process. **Then, Ohioans realized that this system no longer represented their needs or concerns. A few years ago, Ohioans voted by over 70% to redistrict Ohio. Now, your constituents are paying attention!** In 2021, citizens are taking part in map-making to produce Fair maps drawn in accordance with the new redistricting rules. It will no longer be possible to pretend that what the legislature comes up with are the best or only maps possible unless you take into account all the maps that consider communities as well as demographics.

These new maps must be taken into account, as the amendment to our Ohio Constitution now says. Ohio citizens will be watching carefully what those charged with redrawing the district lines will be doing. To help advance our concerns, many of us will be submitting maps that take into account the issues I mentioned above for my rural area, as well as all the other community and demographic issues and priorities each area considers important (see my 1st map attached for my area as a consideration).

There are considerable opportunities the commission will have in order to have these maps approach the best Ohio can be. Please do this in a professional, non-partisan, and most advantageous way for Ohio to build even better communities. That is how Ohio will grow, not shrink, as it has done over the past 10 years. Ohio has lost one Congressional seat because of a shrinking population. **People are leaving, in part, because of the partisan way Ohio is gerrymandered. Let's fix this together now!**

I ask you to consider my testimony to ensure fair maps are drawn to include all mapping submitted to the Commission as a whole unit.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my request.

I will now take any questions you may have.

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Date: August 26, 2021