Redistricting reform is long past due in this state. While I am excited that this body is finally addressing this issue, I am disappointed by both the bill and the timing.

The proposed legislation essentially legalizes gerrymandering. Lines 285 thru 291 allow communities to be split as much or more than already imposed to create safe districts. If this legislation is passed, the Ohio Constitution will contain language that codifies “packing and cracking.” Further there is no language that states that districts should not be drawn to favor or disfavor a political party or candidates; the absence of this language could be construed as mandating a political approach to what should be a non-partisan issue. The bill does require some measure of bipartisan support for passage, by requiring new plans to get a percentage of minority party votes. However, the possible bipartisan check of having the Governor involved has been removed. Lines 104 to 114 give the General Assembly the right to approve the redistricting plan without the Governor’s signature. Also as State Sen. Vernon Sykes, a black Akron Democrat, observed, SJR 5 also would give Republicans a lever to try to split Democrats based on race by allowing - at least as the state legislature currently is constituted - a redistricting plan to pass with only the votes of Democrats of color. ‘It divides the minority party along racial lines -- it's distasteful,’ Sykes said on Cleveland.com. 1 (1Cleveland.com Editorial Board posted 1/19/2018)

This legislation is being pushed through to make the May 2018 primary ballot. This is a direct attempt to circumvent the will of almost 200,000 Ohioans who have signed the Fair Districts=Fair Elections Initiative Petition and the hard work of thousands of volunteers who have stood in the heat and the cold to get those signatures as there have been no paid circulators. Further primary elections historically have lower voter turnout than general elections, because voters who are not affiliated with a party do not vote. If we are going to take this to the voters, the goal should be to maximize the number of people who vote and reflect the wishes of the broadest possible number of Ohioans. The timing and the language not only invalidate these efforts, but create a change in the Constitution of the State of Ohio which would require a complete restart to the process of mandating a fair and equitable, non-partisan approach to determining the representative districts in the state.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to speak.,

Wendy Dyer

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