Testimony to the Senate Government Oversight & Reform Committee on SJR-5 (Sen. Matt Huffman)

1/23/18

By Katie Barnes

Thank you for the opportunity to speak here today and thank you for your service to the citizens of Ohio. I am truly grateful for the opportunity to address you directly. My remarks will be short.

As a granddaughter of immigrants to this great country, I learned at a very early age what an honor and privilege it is to live in a country where democracy prevails.

As the daughter of a WWII veteran who was permanently disabled while serving this country, I learned at a very early age how important it is to be willing to fight for our democracy.

So that is why I am here today- to fight for a fair and representative democracy. Ohio is currently approximately half Democrat and half Republican. The numbers vary a little but it’s close to 48-52% or 49-51%. However, under the current map, our representation in Congress is 4 Democrats and 12 Republicans. This is clearly not a fair representation of our population.

The Congressional Redistricting Proposal known as SJR-5 feels like an assault on our democracy with its complete absence of bipartisan input. In 2015, Ohio voters overwhelmingly voted to reduce partisan districting by approving the Ohio Redistricting Commission to draw the Ohio General Assembly district lines. And Ohio voters now have the opportunity to vote to have this same commission draw the district lines for our representation at the federal level. We already have a system in place to create fair district through the current Redistricting Commission, so there is no need to create an entirely new system to draw the US Congressional district lines.

SJR-5 clearly subverts the will of Ohioans. SJR-5 does nothing to prevent partisan gerrymandering. SJR-5 does nothing to stop state lawmakers from injecting their partisan plans for ongoing unfair districts, and it institutionalizes the practice of “cracking” in which urban counties are split, effectively diminishing the impact of votes in these counties. Ohioans deserve better than this!

We depend on you, our elected representatives, to do everything in your power to ensure that Ohioans have fair districts and fair elections. We depend on you to put the needs of your constituents above the partisan districting being foisted upon us currently. We depend on you to protect our precious democracy by having the integrity and the courage to stand up and fulfill your responsibility to the citizens who entrusted you with the power to protect our right to fair representation.

Thank you.