

Michael Ahern's Testimony
Before the Senate Local Government and Elections Committee
11/4/2021

Good morning members of the Senate Local Government and Elections Committee, My name is Michael Ahern. I am an unaffiliated voter and I live in Blacklick.

The decisions you make in redrawing District maps will directly affect me, my taxes, how my taxes are spent, my quality of life and that of my family as I vote in the Districts drawn by you through this process. I want to be confident that the District I live in for the next ten years was fairly and transparently drawn in a manner that represents my community of interest, even if the elected person for that District is not the person I voted for or does not fully align with my preferences or values. A community of interest is a compact geographic area that shares cultural, historical, or economic interests that benefits from cohesive representation in government.

I am here today to emphasize why your work is so important to me. The redistricting rules are operating under today were incorporated into the Ohio Constitution through the votes of over 70% of Ohio voters in all 88 counties. The reforms are designed specifically to temper Political Party influence in the redistricting process. Use the tools Ohio voters have given you to draw Fair Districts this cycle.

As you go about your work, I ask you to keep the following in the forefront of your minds. Redistricting is, or in fact should be, nonpartisan and community-based just like the rest of the process we rely upon to ensure the Constitutional right of representative democracy is fulfilled.

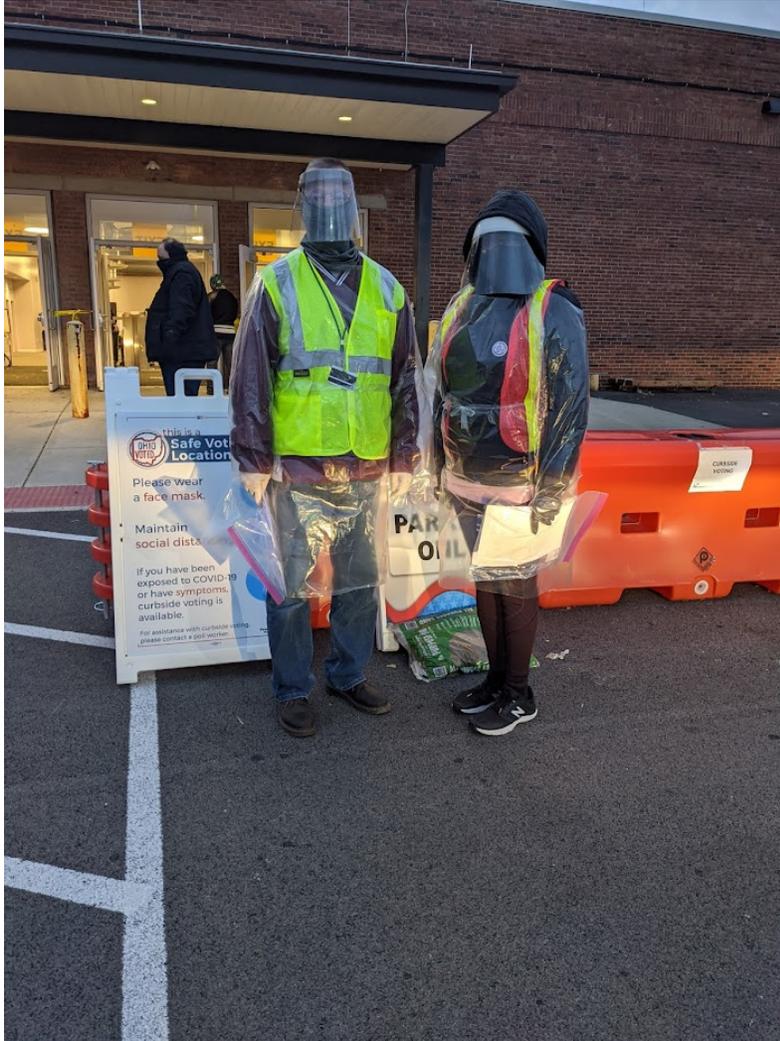
In November 2020 and for the past few weeks, I worked side by side as a poll worker with your fellow Democrats and Republicans. I saw first hand the non-partisan dedication embodied by my coworkers as they ensured that every qualified voter that arrived for early voting at the Franklin County Board of Elections was able to cast their vote and that the votes were

tallied properly. As Secretary LaRose stated in the Dayton hearing on the State maps, such dedication resulted in a 99.8% accuracy rate for the 2020 election in the vote tallying process based on a post election audit.

The November 2020 election in Ohio was run during the full swing of the pandemic at a time when no vaccine was available and few if any COVID-19 treatment options were generally available. The people that worked that election, literally put their lives on the line for representative democracy. Some did so in Districts that are so gerrymandered that the winner of the race was virtually preordained. Why? Because when they were working, they were dedicated to the federal and State Constitutional requirements associated with running free and fair elections, not their Party's preferred candidates. They were doing their job. Likewise, you must dedicate yourselves in a nonpartisan manner as you go about your work on this Commission. You owe it to them and to voters.

I am here today to highlight that both poll workers and voters literally risked their lives during the November 2020 election to ensure our peaceful democratic process endures. While voting was peaceful, January 6th serves as a warning that gerrymandering plays a role in undermining our representative democracy. While partisans foment the big lie, you have the ability - in fact, the duty, to draw districts that avoid future violence and support the peaceful dedication to democracy by voters and poll workers.

What I present is not hyperbole. During the 2020 early voting period, I worked as part of the team providing curbside voting to those with medical conditions that prevented them from coming into the building whether due to disabilities, compromised immune systems, or were sick with COVID-19. Included with my testimony is a picture of two team members who handled Covid-19 voters.



You can't tell which Party they're registered with but you can see the extent of dedication that they exemplified to ensure that everyone was able to vote.

The PPE you see in that picture was an on-the-fly adjustment to accommodate the inexorable drive to vote and the faith and dedication that the electorate and poll workers have in our voting system.

I'd like to provide just one example of how deeply people want their vote to count.

A minivan pulled up with a woman in the driver's seat and a man in the passenger seat. The driver rolled her window down and she said that she

was there so that her husband could vote. She was wearing a mask. He looked like he should be at the emergency room rather than at the board of elections. We worked as quickly as possible to provide the paperwork so that he could vote. When he was finished, his sealed ballot was placed in a ziplock bag and to be processed later by representatives of both political parties, including the added steps of decontaminating the bag and donning gloves before putting the ballot into the machine to be processed. As we were given the completed ballot, we wished them both well and hoped that the man would be well. I don't know what happened to him after they left, but I do know that he felt so strongly about participating in our representative democracy that he and his wife did everything they could to make sure that he could vote.

Wouldn't you agree that Districts should be as fair as possible and represent communities of interest if people are willing to put their lives on the line as poll workers and voters?

I know that you are tasked with redrawing Districts and that I have talked a lot about voting. So, why do I relay these stories? I relay them because I want you to keep in mind how important it is to regular citizens that they can not only participate in voting, but that their vote is not wasted in elections where the District boundaries are so politically rigged that the candidate that they voted for never had a chance to win based on the platform they present. Fair Districts underpin all the dedication, sacrifice and expectations embodied in representative democracy.

Voters are the intended source of power under the United States Constitution with what should be the tempering deliberation of elected officials as legislation is written. Political gerrymandering severely undermines this basic construct. Your ability to temper the passions of radicals within the electorate starts with compact Fair Districts representing communities rather than political parties and partisan power.

With this in mind, I urge you to keep towns, cities and counties as whole as possible and look to metropolitan planning organization boundaries when

areas need to be split. MPOs are technocratic, nonpartisan pass-throughs that bring together legislators, executives, citizens and the business community to consider and enact significant public project funding that generally represents and supports economic communities of interest.

In closing, throw away political gerrymandering as you draw new Districts. The reforms to the Ohio Constitution demand it because over 70 percent of Ohio voters know that it makes a mockery of our nonpartisan voting process and is dangerously destructive to our form of representative democracy.

Thank you for your time and consideration.