



Ohio

Holding Power Accountable

**Testimony by Catherine Turcer, Common Cause Ohio
Before the Ohio Senate Local Government and Elections Committee
On Senate Bill 258
November 8, 2021**

My name is Catherine Turcer and I am the executive director of Common Cause Ohio. I am here today to testify in opposition to Senate Bill 258.

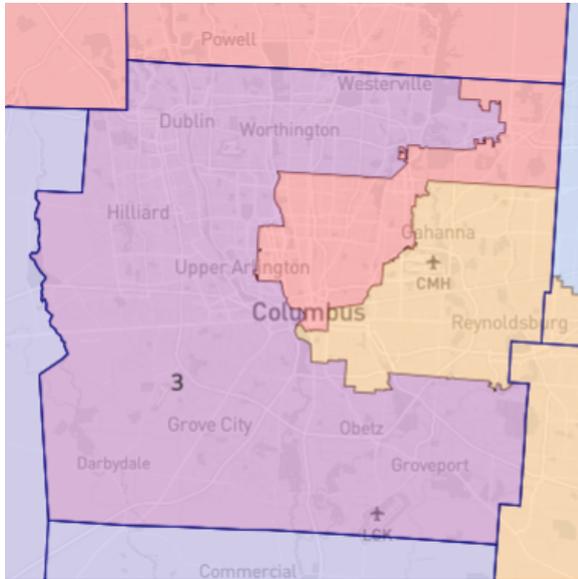
I am here today to remind you that the newly revised Ohio Constitution requires you to do better this year than the Ohio General Assembly did in 2011. Ohioans overwhelmingly pushed back against the very gerrymandered 2011 congressional map and passed Issue 1 of May 2018 by nearly 75% of the vote.

Ohio voters want to participate in meaningful elections and the best way to ensure meaningful elections is by keeping communities together. The Ohio Constitution now focuses on **counties** as the building blocks of congressional districts. While counties are not a perfect proxy for communities, the rules against splitting them are intended to ensure that communities are kept together so that those folks we send to Washington are able to truly represent us.

While some splits are permitted -- primarily because the amendment was intended to last for decades-- it doesn't make sense to split counties and divide communities unless necessary. My testimony is going to focus on avoiding the division of any county more than once.

Senate Bill 258 does keep the majority of counties whole, but the mapmakers repeatedly and unnecessarily sliced and diced the most **populous** counties. Fourteen counties are split a total of 17 times. **These county splits impact nearly a third of Ohioans (31.26%).**

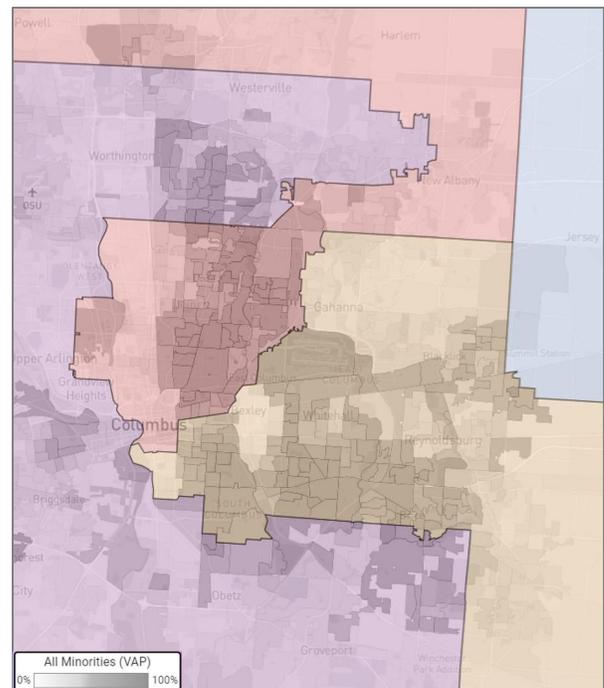
The result by design is a map that overtly favors the political party in power. Let's take **Franklin County** as an example.



Franklin County is divided into three congressional districts. There is no compelling need to divide the county in this way. This begs the question as to *why* the mapmakers decided to divide the county into three districts (instead of two), as well as *why* the district lines have been drawn exactly *where* they have been drawn. The answer to these questions becomes clear when we overlay the district map on top of a map showing the minority population in Columbus.

Even a cursory glance at the map reveals how problematic the slicing and dicing through Franklin County is. The careful and intentional placement of the district lines divides the minority population -- which predominantly extends to the north and east of downtown Columbus -- between **three** separate districts. Three. As a result, the mapmakers failed to create *even a single Opportunity District* (a district with more than 35% Black Voting Age Population) in Franklin County.

Intentionally dividing the voting power of the African-American population of Franklin County fails the intent and spirit of the reforms approved by Ohio voters in 2018. These divisions cannot stand. Voters deserve the opportunity to elect representation that reflect their community.



A closer examination of a single unified neighborhood in northeast Columbus shows the hard work (and chicanery) that has gone into drawing these districts: it's always harder to gerrymander than to draw fair maps! This neighborhood is nestled between the 270 beltway to

the east and the lovely Alum Creek multi-use trail to the west, and is accessible via either Rt. 161 or Sunbury Road.



Why, in this neighborhood, are neighbors divided into two separate congressional districts? How can such a division benefit the residents of this community? Has the map been drawn with their interests in mind? Clearly, it has not. Dividing this neighborhood, and other neighborhoods like it, will only sow confusion as to who a resident’s representative is and where the resident should vote. If the intent is to depress voter turnout by people of color, as it seems to be, then shame. I urge you to focus on voters and keeping communities together and amend this bill so that voting districts empower voters, not political parties.

The strange divisions continue across other districts that include portions of Franklin.

Congressional District 3: While CD3 is entirely in Franklin County, CD 4 starts in the heart of the city of Columbus, then works its way northwest all the way to Allen County. Why? Congressional District 4 includes all or part of eight counties: Allen, Auglaize, Champaign, Delaware, Franklin, Logan, Shelby, and Union.

Congressional District 15: Even these outrageous tricks are nothing compared to CD 15 which also starts in Columbus. It then stretches to Ohio’s



Recommendations: When district lines are moved there is a domino effect. Every change impacts the whole map. I urge you to focus on amending the bill so that counties are kept whole as much as possible. And if they need to be split for equal population requirements, counties should only be divided as few times as necessary.

Drawing maps that keep communities together goes hand in hand with drawing maps that have a fair and proportional outcome. If you choose a congressional district plan that unnecessarily divides counties and communities, you are also choosing to purposefully rig the result of elections to maintain power for the majority party. I urge you to only support plans in which counties and communities are respected. Do not deny the millions of Ohio voters the opportunity to cast a meaningful vote.

ALL Ohio voters deserve to have their voices heard; district lines should not be manipulated to favor the majority party or the political party in power.

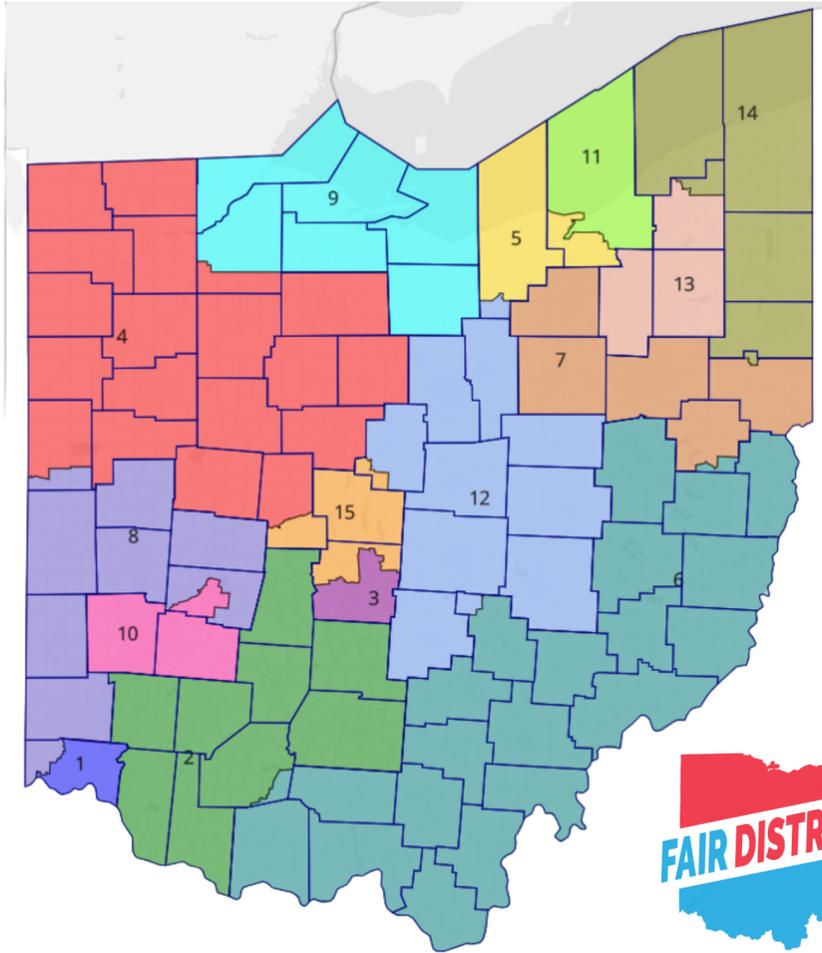
It is quite possible to draw maps that keep communities together AND are more proportional. Here are three examples of maps which only split Franklin County and Hamilton County once:

<https://davesredistricting.org/join/d0e96e3f-054c-42a0-9dbb-b14fbfdd2d40>

Fair Districts Mapping Competition

1st Place Map by John Hagner of Yellow Springs

	JOHN HAGNER	CURRENT CONGRESSIONAL
LIKELY D/R SPLIT	7 Rep / 7 Dem / 1 Competitive	12 Rep / 4 Dem
COUNTY SPLITS	14 counties split 14 times	23 counties split 32 times
COMPACTNESS	74 out of 100	18 out of 100
OVERALL SCORE	351	121

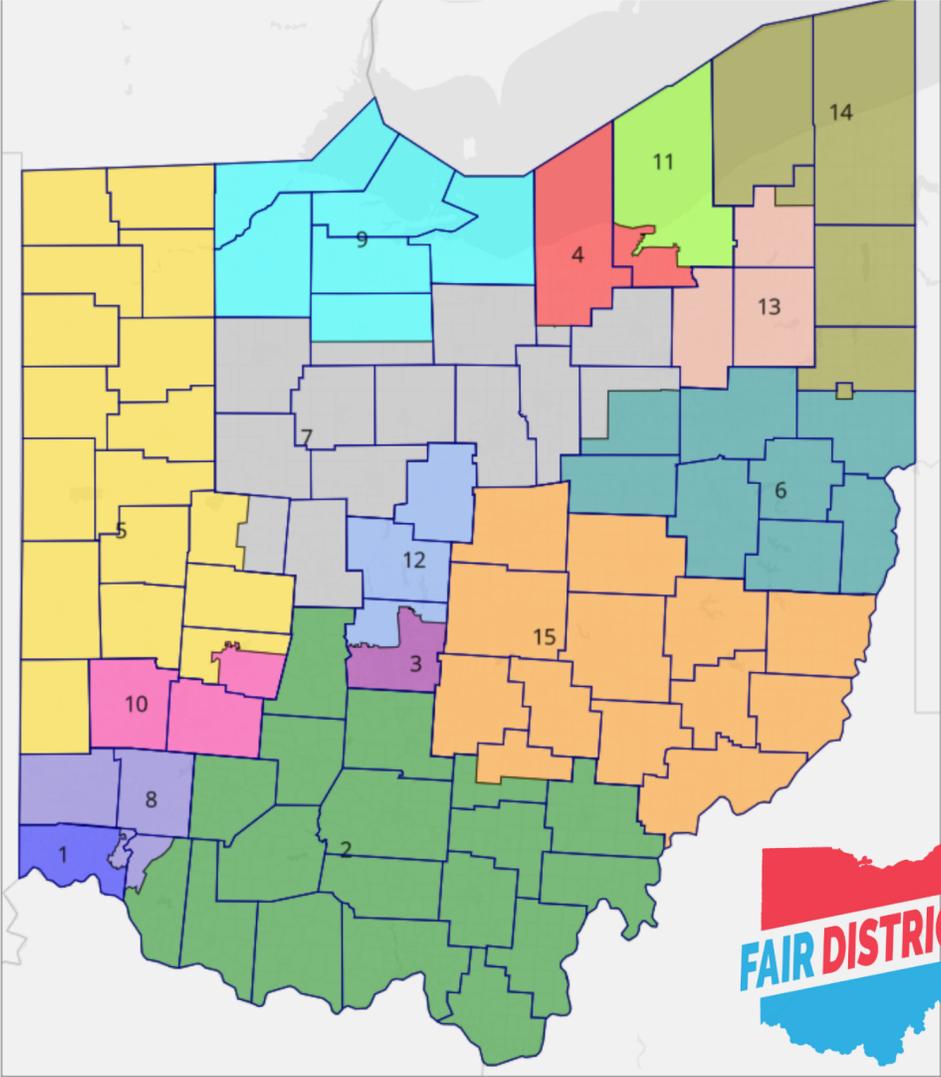


<https://davesredistricting.org/join/824d95df-0cf0-4e78-a7f6-641baeebbcfc>

Fair Districts Mapping Competition

2nd Place Map by Paul Nieves

	<i>PAUL NIEVES</i>	<i>CURRENT CONGRESSIONAL</i>
LIKELY D/R SPLIT	7 Rep / 7 Dem / 1 Competitive	12 Rep / 4 Dem
COUNTY SPLITS	12 counties split 12 times	23 counties split 32 times
COMPACTNESS	77 out of 100	18 out of 100
OVERALL SCORE	346	121

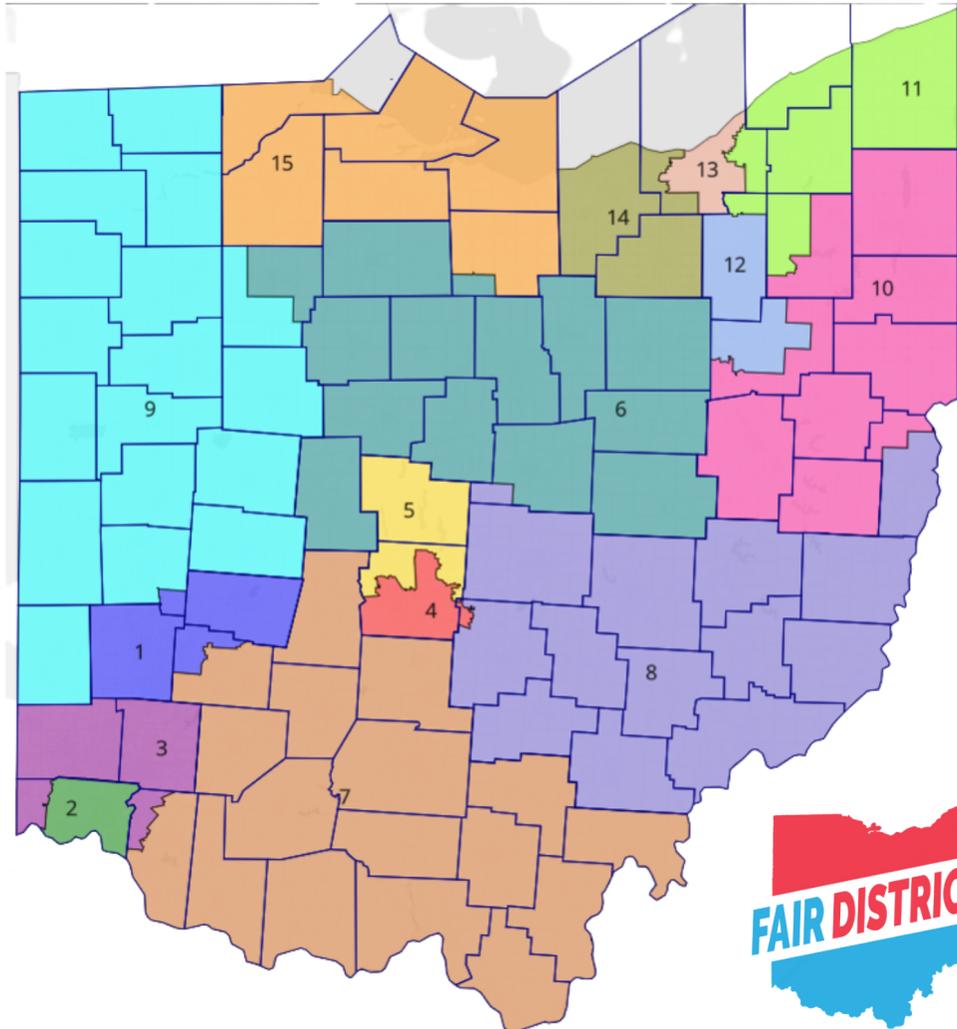


<https://davesredistricting.org/join/5eabaeac-4368-4799-8a05-ec18055b9f7c>

Fair Districts Mapping Competition

3rd Place Map by Riley Jones of Loveland

	<i>RILEY JONES</i>	<i>CURRENT CONGRESSIONAL</i>
LIKELY D/R SPLIT	7 Rep / 5 Dem / 3 Competitive	12 Rep / 4 Dem
COUNTY SPLITS	14 counties split 15 times	23 counties split 32 times
COMPACTNESS	70 out of 100	18 out of 100
OVERALL SCORE	325	121



Here is a link to an overview that I provided to the Ohio Redistricting Commission about these maps:

<https://redistricting.ohio.gov/assets/organizations/redistricting-commission/events/commission-meeting-october-28-2021-96/turcer-catherine-fair-districts-ohio.pdf>

Thank you very much for this opportunity to testify.