

Testimony of: Carrie Coisman  
3688 Brinell Street West  
Columbus, Ohio 43214

HB 479  
Declare intent to establish Congressional districts  
House Government Oversight Committee

Chair Wilkin, Vice Chair Cutrona, Ranking Member O'Brien, and all other members of the Government Oversight Committee, my name is Carrie Coisman and I'm the Ohio Digital Organizer for All On The Line, a grassroots advocacy organization that's working to end partisan gerrymandering. I'm here today, testifying on behalf of myself, but also on behalf of all of All On The Line's volunteers and activists who could not attend today due to the timing of today's hearings and the short notice of when they'd be happening.

Today, I'm going to speak specifically about HB 479 and our future congressional map. I will be talking about what a fair redistricting process looks like and what a fair congressional map must look like to adequately represent Ohioans in Congress.

The Process: Firstly, I'm going to speak about the redistricting process. In September, I testified before the Ohio Redistricting Commission, the body responsible for our state legislative redistricting process and the body that held the pen during the month of October for the congressional redistricting process. The Ohio Redistricting Commission set a poor precedent for a fair and transparent redistricting process and the Ohio General Assembly followed suit when you refused to host hearings or propose maps before your first deadline of September 30th. I hope that this committee, the Ohio House, and the entire Ohio General Assembly will honor the reform measures that Ohioans overwhelmingly voted on in 2018 that codified a supposed fair and transparent process.

However, the scheduling of the redistricting hearings this week causes me grave concern. The public must have their testimony submitted 24 hours before the committee hearing commences. Unfortunately, the sponsor hearings for proposed Democratic and Republican maps happened within that 24-hour window - meaning Ohioans were required to submit testimony on yet-to-be-publicized maps from Republican leadership. That makes it impossible for Ohioans to analyze the maps and to submit testimony speaking to those maps for today's hearing.

I'm grateful to be able to do this work full-time. I'm not a parent or a family caregiver. I'm fully vaccinated and am not immunocompromised. I live 10 minutes away from Cap Square. All of these factors make my testimony today possible. But the way these hearings are being

conducted excludes the voices of thousands of Ohioans. The Ohio General Assembly has the opportunity and the duty to host robust and accessible hearings over the next 26 days. There should be hearings scheduled outside of day-time work hours, around the state, with maps, and with virtual testimony opportunities. The Ohio General Assembly must not keep maps 'in the can' until the last possible moment with the intent to exclude Ohioans' voices. That is not what we voted for in 2018.

Hiding behind excuses of a Census data delay or legal action are not valid as there have been dozens of maps submitted and People's Hearings hosted by Ohioans and organizations, like All On The Line. How are everyday citizens able to do this process so much more efficiently and fairly than the people elected to protect democracy and serve Ohio's constituents on the tax-payer's dollar?

Gerrymandering is political cheating, but it is solvable. Constitutional maps are more than possible and nothing less will be accepted, especially when it's happening through an asinine process run by two legislative leaders that excludes Ohioans at every turn and then results in an unfair map that dilutes the political power of Ohioans.

The Map: Now, regarding the map itself: A truly fair map reflects Ohio's partisan balance, provides real pathways to representation for communities of color, and keeps our communities together.

Ohioans have voted across the decade in a rough split of 46% Democratic and 54% Republican. Our current Congressional delegation has a partisan split of 25% Democratic and 75% Republican ensuring that hundreds of thousands of Ohioans are not having their voices heard in Washington. Ohioans have been grossly misrepresented in Congress due to the surgical gerrymandering that occurred in 2011.

In order to guarantee real representation, as promised by our 2018 reform measures, a fair map should include 7 Democratic congressional seats and 8 Republican seats. These numbers reflect how Ohioans actually vote. Ohio is a purple state with voters who have supported both Democratic and Republican voters statewide, as reflected in the reality that we have a Republican senator and Democratic senator, close gubernatorial elections throughout the decade, different Electoral College showings in 2012 and 2016, lose percentages of statewide vote totals over the last decade. Our districts should reflect how Ohio's communities vote, including some areas with truly competitive seats, instead of entrenching our political future by cracking and packing certain communities.

Rather than diluting certain communities' political power, the maps should anchor Ohio's major cities in their own districts ensuring that our communities of color, urban communities, and new American communities are able to access the promise of democracy.

My home city of Columbus should include as much of our urban core as possible, especially the communities inside of the 270 outer-belt, some of which are currently drowned out into more rural and suburban districts like OH-12 and OH-15. My own community of Clintonville, which is only 10 minutes north of the Statehouse and Ohio State's campus, is pulled up into my hometown of Mansfield and out into the eastern city of Zanesville. It is absurd that I vote in the same Congressional district as my grandparents who live on the Richland and Morrow county line. While I maintain a lot of fondness for my hometown, I do not need to (nor should I) vote with them. Rather, I should be voting with my neighbors who live south of North Broadway in my same neighborhood.

Our cities of Cincinnati, Cleveland, Akron, Toledo, and Dayton should also anchor their own districts. Map drawers should protect against unnecessary packing of communities of color.

Ohio is a unique, beautiful state full of diversity and people who want a future that is safe, bright, and full of promise. This body has the opportunity to right the ship of democracy for the next decade by drawing districts that reflect our values, instead of districts that ensure partisan power, gained not through democracy, but through the manipulation of political geography. Ohioans deserve both a fair process and a fair map, and we made that clear at the ballot box. If we have any hope of maintaining our promise of democracy, Ohioans deserve maps that reflect the true partisan makeup of this state which means our future maps must include 7 Democratic congressional seats and 8 Republican seats. These numbers reflect how Ohioans actually vote and we will accept nothing less.