

Thank you for this opportunity to address you. My name is Iris Meltzer, and I live in Kent, -which is in Congressional District 13. However, today I am writing from the vantage point of being the President of the League of Women Voters of Ohio.

The Ohio League has been working against partisan and racial gerrymandering for nearly fifty years; first against the unfair maps created by Ohio Democrats and most recently against maps drawn to create an unfair advantage for Republicans.

League of Women Voters members from across Ohio played a key role in collecting signatures for the Ballot Initiative in 2018 in support of fair maps. We educated voters on the impact of gerrymandering on our state and the initiative was passed overwhelmingly in all of our 88 counties by over 70% of the vote. We naively believed that once passed and part of our Ohio Constitution, our Legislature – you-- would follow the Constitution as rewritten to reflect the will of the people. As a venerable nonpartisan organization, perhaps we are naïve to want to create a democracy where everyone’s voice is heard equally and equitably. But we stand by our values and continue to strive to Make Democracy Work.

Our democracy is hurt when politicians of any party manipulate voting maps to keep themselves and their party in power. Simply put, partisan gerrymandering takes away voter choice and fuels partisan polarization. When incumbents are all but assured their re-election, they do not need to serve their voters and instead play to party extremes and big donors.

First, we’ve been calling on you to uphold the letter and the spirit of this reform by creating a transparent, bipartisan, and open process. The maps as HB 479 fails to meet even these basic tenets. From the maps created by the winners of the Fair Maps competition held by the Ohio League, we know that fair maps that are competitive, compact, protect minority rights, are politically competitive, and split the least number of counties are possible.

An open process requires officials to publicly explain the basis for their decisions and allows the public the opportunity to hold their elected officials accountable.

The lines created this year will determine how communities are divided, how resources are allocated, and how voters are represented for up to the next ten years. The League of Women Voters of Ohio asks that you respect not only the letter, but the spirit of the Constitutional Amendment for drawing our congressional maps. We want a map that is compact, respects local government subdivisions as much as possible, and is not drawn to favor one political party or candidate over another. To reiterate, fair maps can be drawn that are consistent with the Ohio Constitution.

We ask you to put democracy above your personal or partisan interests and bring fair congressional maps to the people.

Thank you for your time.

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