Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, good afternoon. My name is Susan Haas, and I’m a resident of Hopewell Township, Licking County.

Love for our democracy was instilled in me from an early age. I was born just days after my mother had voted for her second time ever. Before she was 13, she’d fled with her family from the Nazis in Germany, then from fascists in Italy and finally from the Maoists in China, and she became an American citizen as soon as she was eligible. She knew how precious our right to vote is, and she taught that to me. Her vision of what our nation stands for, and what it could be, is something I’ve held on to all my life.

But in the face of a proposal as cynical as SJR 5, it’s hard to hold on to my idealism.

First, there’s the fact that this Resolution is an abandonment of the bipartisan Working Group that was announced to such fanfare last fall. Passing a Resolution over the objections of both minority party members of the Working Group, would create the appearance that the Working Group was never anything more than a smokescreen on which good government advocates could focus our energy and attention.

Then, there’s the timing of this proposal, and the rush to ram it through the General Assembly just three weeks after its introduction. I don’t need to remind this Committee that neither of the redistricting proposals on the table would take effect until 2021. There is only one reason to insist that SJR 5 be presented to the voters in May – and that is so that they won’t have the opportunity to vote on the Fair Districts proposal that the Coalition has been working toward for the past year. People have noticed. Newspaper editorials have drawn attention to SJR 5, and not in a positive way – and volunteers all over the state, gathering signatures for the Fair Districts Initiative, have reported a significant uptick in people approaching us to sign our petition.

Then, there’s the content of SJR 5. Both in news reports and in testimony, cartographers and election law experts have explained how the Resolution wouldn’t affect the majority party’s ability to draw districts to favor itself and consolidate power out of proportion to the will of the voters. That’s outside my own expertise. But some of the procedural clauses in the Resolution stand out. There’s the fact that maps would be passed by the General Assembly as Resolutions, not Bills – and that therefore they’d be unreviewable except by the courts. Not by the Governor via veto, and not by the citizens via referendum.

There’s also a phrase that’s been widely misconstrued about the votes needed for a mapping resolution to pass the General Assembly. SJR 5 does NOT require a map to be approved by any fraction of the members of the minority party. It states that a plan could be enacted under each procedure with the approval of one-third or one-fifth of the members who are **not members of the majority party**. As the General Assembly is presently constituted, it’s a distinction without a difference. But when the districts are drawn, there’s a real possibility there could be Senators or Representatives who are independents or members of third parties. If they could be persuaded to approve a proposed map, then a ten-year map could be put in place at the first step, with the approval of a much smaller fraction of the minority caucus. Article XIX, §1(A)(2)§2(B)(3)(b) and 2(B)(c)(ii).

Then, there’s the deflection from the merits of SJR 5 by using criticism of the Fair Districts Initiative purportedly to support the pending Resolution. Whether or not the Fair Districts proposal is workable, whether it would accomplish the goals that its proponents believe it will, are completely irrelevant to the merits of SJR 5. If it’s the sense of this Committee and of the General Assembly that SJR 5 is significantly better than the Fair Districts Amendment, then place it on the November ballot, educate your constituents about the differences between the two proposals, and why you think they should choose this one. If you think SJR 5 is better for the citizens than Fair Districts, then trust the citizens to choose the best proposal in a head-to-head contest.

Finally, there’s SJR 5’s cost to the state. Of course there’s the cost of putting an additional proposal to the voters, when the Fair Districts Coalition already expects and hopes to be able to do so ourselves. But regardless of the merits of the Fair Districts Amendment or whether or not it gets to the ballot, if SJR 5 were to become part of our Constitution, that would entail additional costs as well. Sen. Huffman has been quoted as saying that in most cases, the task of map-drawing would probably go to the Redistricting Commission – the one that’s been already constituted to draw General Assembly districts, and that the Fair Districts initiative would task with Congressional redistricting from the outset. If that’s the case, why use state funds to contract with cartographers and hold the two required public hearings on a General Assembly resolution, if the Redistricting Commission will probably have to do it all over again, anyway? The State doesn’t have unlimited funds in its coffers, and writing a bureaucratic procedure into our Constitution, that its own main proponent acknowledges is probably futile, seems the very opposite of fiscal responsibility.

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, thank you for your time; and may I also extend my thanks to all the staffers who made it possible for this hearing to take place today.