



BEFORE THE SENATE GOVERNMENT OVERSIGHT & REFORM
COMMITTEE

Interested Party Testimony on Senate Joint Resolution 5
January 23, 2018

Chairman Coley, Ranking Member Schiavoni and members of the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee, my name is Keith Lake and I am the Vice President of Government Affairs for the Ohio Chamber of Commerce. I am here today to testify as an interested party on Senate Joint Resolution 5, which proposes an amendment to the Ohio Constitution to establish standards and procedures for congressional redistricting.

The Ohio Chamber is the state's leading business advocate, and we represent nearly 8,000 companies that do business in Ohio. Our mission is to aggressively champion free enterprise, economic competitiveness and growth for the benefit of all Ohioans.

Twice in the past 15 years, in 2005 and in 2012, citizen initiated proposals to change the way Ohio draws congressional district lines have made it to the ballot. Both times the proposals were soundly defeated by voters. Both times the Ohio Chamber opposed these efforts.

The resolution adopted by the Ohio Chamber's Board of Directors in 2012 opposing that year's State Issue 2 proposal read, in part, as follows:

"The board of directors of the Ohio Chamber of Commerce urges sensible reforms to Ohio's redistricting and reapportionment process but strongly opposes the constitutional amendment proposed in Issue 2 because it fails to reflect an accountable, bipartisan approach that Ohio voters can rely on to produce effective reform and fair legislative and congressional districts."

By contrast, the Ohio Chamber supported State Issue 1 in 2015, the constitutional amendment creating a bipartisan, public process for drawing state legislative

districts. We supported this proposal because it was spearheaded by the bipartisan duo of then-Reps. Matt Huffman and Vernon Sykes, was put on the ballot by overwhelming bipartisan majorities of the General Assembly, and, most importantly, prevents one political party from controlling the process. Voters, too, strongly supported this proposal, as it passed with over 70 percent of the vote.

The Ohio Chamber would prefer the congressional redistricting process be revised the same way – beginning with a proposal put on the ballot by the General Assembly after it has garnered support from strong, bipartisan majorities.

That's why I'm here today, to urge members of both parties to put aside your partisan differences and forge a bipartisan solution that can be presented to voters in 2018.

While a step in the right direction, SJR 5 is not yet that. Unfortunately, what we've observed up to this point is much criticism of SJR 5 but not much in the way of constructive feedback. We urge everyone to work together to find a solution that does what our Board urged in its 2012 resolution: develop "an accountable, bipartisan approach that Ohio voters can rely on to produce effective reform and fair congressional districts."

We urge Democrats to roll up your sleeves, be active participants in the negotiations, and offer realistic suggestions. We urge Republicans to make sure Democrats have a seat at the table and to give their concerns about SJR 5 due consideration.

We understand that the process of drawing congressional district lines is critically important to both political parties. But the current process isn't working for Ohioans and must be reformed. It leads to diminished General Election competition and contributes to intensified partisanship and contentiousness, which turns off otherwise qualified potential public servants from pursuing office.

Finally, the Ohio Chamber doesn't want – and voters don't deserve – another unnecessary and expensive General Election fight over a take-it-or-leave-it redistricting proposal developed without input from both parties. We've been down that road before.

Therefore, we urge you to come together now, to solve this issue in a truly bipartisan manner. Thank you.