

Ohio Redistricting Commission
Written Testimony by Cathy Cowan Becker
Thursday, November 4, at 9:30 a.m.

Chair Gavarone, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Maharath, and members of the Senate Local Government and Elections Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony about redistricting in Ohio. My name is Cathy Cowan Becker, and I live in Columbus near Grove City on the southwest side of Franklin County. I am writing today to ask you to adhere to the criteria for Congressional redistricting maps as set forth in the Ohio Constitution through two amendments approved by the majority of Ohio voters.

Let me start with the criteria for drawing new Congressional districts. These criteria include:

- Equal population – not just of voters but everyone living in Ohio. Ohio's population is 11.8 million. Divided by 15 districts, that is around 787,000 people per district.
- Partisan fairness – no district can unduly favor one party over another. In other words, no gerrymandering. Districts should match the way Ohioans have voted over the last decade – 54% Republican and 46% Democrat. That means the 15 districts should result in seven that lean Democratic and eight that lean Republican.
- Keeping communities together – Where possible, whole cities such as Cleveland and Cincinnati should be kept together. Columbus is too big for one district, but needs to be split responsibly. Akron, Dayton, and Toledo should each be kept whole.
- Compact and contiguous. Statewide 65 counties must be kept whole, 18 counties may be split once, and only 5 counties can be split twice. But if you can do fewer splits, you should.
- There is no protection for incumbents in new maps. Our current maps are highly gerrymandered – politicians are picking their voters, not the other way around. This much change.
- Diluting the influence of minority voters through packing and cracking is prohibited. This takes the voice of substantial portions of the population.

As you may know, Ohio ranks as one of the worst gerrymandered states in the country. That is not a feature to be proud of. From the Snake on the Lake to the Duck, our gerrymandered districts are the butt of jokes across the country.

Even worse, gerrymandering polarizes our politics. When all our districts are pre-destined to be either Republican or Democrat because of how they are drawn, then candidates must out-Right or out-Left each other to win. It's no accident our national politics have become more and more polarized. That's a direct result of gerrymandering in so many states, but especially Ohio.

Let me give you a couple of examples from my personal experience. I am the elected representative for Columbus Ward 79 to Franklin County Democratic Party Central Committee. Half of my ward is in Congressional District 3, with the other half in CD 15.

It makes no sense for a unit as small as a voting ward to be split between two Congressional districts, yet when you look at the demographics, you can see clear differences. My constituents in CD 3, which is majority Democratic, are immigrants and people of color, mostly lower income living in apartments. My constituents in CD 15, which is Republican, are majority white, higher income, and homeowners.

Why have they been split in this manner? All of them are residents of Columbus living in the same part of town, yet gerrymandering made sure one type of person got put into CD 3 and another in CD 15. That should be illegal. People of all backgrounds need to be working together to form coherent public policy that serves everyone. That can't happen if people are split into different districts based on demographics.

Here's another example on a more macro level. I recently earned a dual master's degree in public policy and environment and natural resources at Ohio State University. My particular area of study was what cities can do to lower carbon emissions to address the climate crisis.

Because of gerrymandering, the Ohio legislature is 75% Republican even though Ohio voters are split pretty evenly between Republicans and Democrats. We are a purple state, but on the political map we are red because of gerrymandering.

That has had grave consequences for trying to deal with the climate crisis in Ohio. Our legislature has 1) made Ohio the only state to repeal its renewable energy standards, 2) gutted our energy efficiency programs, 3) had a House speaker charged in a \$61 million bribery scheme to bail out one utility's old coal and nuclear plants, 4) passed legislation banning cities from setting goals for renewable energy, and 5) crippled the wind and solar industries with requirements that do not apply to coal, oil, gas, or any sort of fossil fuel infrastructure.

Ohio is known nationally for its backward and corrupt energy policies, and it's a disgrace. It's also largely a result of gerrymandering. The citizens of Ohio want renewable energy. A [March 2018 poll](#) found that 7 in 10 Ohio voters favored a goal of generating 100% of the state's electricity using clean and renewable sources like solar and wind by 2030. A [February 2019 poll](#) found that two-thirds of Ohio **conservatives** believe the state should generate at least half of its energy from renewable sources. And an [October 2019 poll](#) found that two-thirds of Ohio voters said developing renewable energy is the most important strategy to address Ohio's energy needs.

Yet our legislature, answering to a corrupt utility instead of the people who elected them, has done everything it can to squash renewable energy, along with the investment, good-paying jobs, and improved health that comes with it. When politicians know they are in safe seats due to gerrymandering, they don't have to listen to what their constituents want. They can do what their donors want. And that is why energy policy is such a disgrace in Ohio.

Thank you again for the chance to testify on redistricting maps. You have a big job before you, and it imperative that you do it right.