



TESTIMONY OF:

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INTERESTED PARTY:

Senate Local Government & Elections Committee
Senate Bill 237 (Congressional Districts)
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Chair Gavarone, Vice-Chair O'Brien, Ranking Minority Member Maharath, and distinguished members of the Senate Local Government & Elections Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 237, specifically for the need for fair, equitable maps in the Congressional redistricting process.

My name is Erin Ryan and I serve as the Managing Director of the Ohio Women's Public Policy Network, a coalition of nearly 40 organizations working collaboratively to advocate for public policy solutions that build economic opportunity for women and families. Equity is pivotal to our mission as a coalition and should remain a fundamental consideration in all policy creation. **That is why we stand with the voices of Ohio advocates, stakeholders, and leaders from across our great state to urge you to create Congressional districts that accurately represent our diverse communities and how Ohioans vote.**

We are one of more than thirty members of the Equal Districts Coalition, a state-based group collectively advocating for fair maps. Our reason for joining this robust, diverse coalition is simple: Redistricting is a gender justice issue. The process for how our Congressional maps are drawn, and the final approved maps, will have immediate and long-term consequences on the lives of Ohio women and their families.

The current gerrymandered system has distorted, undermined, and silenced the voice of many voters, which has led to partisan extremism in Congressional elections - hurting the interests of women. Partisan gerrymandering fosters an environment with limited accountability, extremism policymaking, and elected leaders who do not represent Ohio. This redistricting process will shape our state for the next decade - we cannot afford to play politics with it.

The interests of women across our state are intertwined with the decisions made during the Congressional redistricting process. Many times, the issues that disproportionately serve women are relegated to “just” women’s issues; ignored, rolled back, undervalued. When in fact, these are economic issues, family issues, and community issues. The pandemic and accompanying economic crisis have brought the issues facing women, particularly women of color, into the forefront: balancing caregiving and work, facing low-wage and low-security jobs, accessing health care services, unstable and unaffordable housing, and more.

Fair maps would address the hyper-partisanship and extremism within our Congressional elections, providing the opportunity for the issues impacting women and families to be better reflected. Under the current gerrymandered system, districts are drawn to ensure that certain political parties win, and the leading candidate is most often decided through the primary election, guaranteeing that partisan extremism selects the winner. This creates an environment where, far too often, the issues that candidates stand for do not align with the priorities of the women and families it impacts. For example, Congressional candidates and elected officials supporting extreme abortion bans, despite the majority of Ohioans supporting abortion access while, at the same time, failing to call for common-sense and widely supported legislative issues like paid family leave. Instead, by drawing fair, equitable maps, there would be more of an opportunity to advance efforts that tackle the issues women and families are facing everyday in our communities.

This legislative body holds immense power in ensuring that the Congressional redistricting process is fair, equitable, transparent, and constitutional. We urge you to advance maps that:

- **Provide representational fairness**, based on the preferences of Ohio voters over the past decade, by including **no more than 55% Republican seats (Ohio has voted an average of 55% Republican over the past decade)**
- Ensure that communities of color have **adequate and real pathways to political representation**
- **Keep communities together and refrain from partisan redistricting tactics**, such as “cracking” and “packing,” which distort and divide communities’ power
- Utilize a **transparent and public process** with input and insight from Ohioans, as required by the Ohio Constitution

We believe that policymaking is strengthened when Ohioans, especially women, are included and centered throughout the process. However, without fair and equitable maps that truly represent competitive and diverse districts, the voices of voters are outweighed by a rigged system. With fair maps, we envision a diverse and equitable future where all communities are

represented, where voters' voices are heard, and where our communities' best interests are at the heart of policymaking. This future is possible, but it will require the attention and commitment from this Committee to put Ohioans' best interests first - and that means fair and accurate maps.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony for today's hearing on Senate Bill 237. I am available to answer any questions by email at ryan@innovationohio.org.

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