



November 4, 2021

Senate Local Government and Elections Committee
Proponent Testimony, SB237

Chairwoman Gavarone, Ranking Member Maharath, and other committee members -

My name is Katy Shanahan and I am the Ohio State Director for All On The Line, a grassroots advocacy organization that is working to restore fairness to our redistricting process and to end gerrymandering.

For the last decade, Ohioans have lived under some of the most gerrymandered congressional districts in the country. Our current district lines carve apart our neighborhoods, dilute our political voice, and diminish the power of our votes.

Our current maps aren't fair. But this year, you all have a chance to rectify that. In fact, you have a duty to do so. The Senate Democratic caucus has shown us how that's possible by offering their proposed map enshrined in SB237 - a map that I testify in strong support of today.

What does a fair map for Ohio look like? A fair map is one that keeps our communities together, it provides real pathways to representation for Ohio's communities of color, and it reflects how we actually vote. By all counts, the Senate Democratic map does this - offering us a really good place to start community-led conversations about how best to serve Ohio under a new congressional map.

Keeping Our Communities Together

A fair map would keep Ohio's communities together as much as possible - particularly those in and around the state's largest cities - to ensure adequate political representation. Our current map does a masterful job at carving apart especially our biggest cities with the purpose of undercutting their political power.

My own congressional district is a perfect example of this practice. I live in Clintonville, an urban and progressive Columbus neighborhood that's about a 10-minute drive from the Statehouse. The bulk of my life revolves around Columbus - I grew up here, I went to school here, I work in and around downtown Columbus and its surrounding suburbs. But my congressional district lines take me out of Columbus and into a seat that stretches an hour north to Mansfield and an hour east to Zanesville that is otherwise rural and conservative.

A fair map would reverse that sort of cracking. It would anchor congressional districts in each of Ohio's major cities - Cleveland, Cincinnati, Columbus, Toledo, Dayton, and Akron - to ensure that each of

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them is represented wholly and not just in part. It would minimize county splits to maximize community representation. Special attention should also be paid to their surrounding suburban areas to avoid what happens under the current lines with them being cracked apart and drowned into rural districts.

By prioritizing keeping communities together in these metro areas, map drawers will also be able to achieve the statewide ideal of partisan fairness. By not cracking and packing these areas, a new map would help un-gerrymander the currently enacted map and provide representation that is more in line with the state of Ohio.

Additionally, it's important that our map ensures that the power of each Ohioans vote is fully realized. To live up to the constitutional promise of 'one person, one vote,' our districts should be drawn so that no one person's vote holds any more or less power than another person's vote. But redistricting is a balancing act. There are always multiple, important interests at issue, but ultimately maximizing community representation is key. Any attempt to use 'one person, one vote' as a smokescreen for an unfair map defeats the goals of fair representation.

Providing Pathways to Representation for Ohio's Communities of Color

A fair map will provide communities of color real pathways to political representation by reversing the current gerrymandering that dilutes their voting power across the state. Anchoring districts in and around each of Ohio's major cities will not only better serve those communities overall, it also serves as an important protection against gerrymandering for communities of color.

Special attention must be paid to the areas in our state where we have seen considerable growth or shifts in especially immigrant and new American communities - like the Somali and east Asian communities in and around my hometown of Columbus. Where we have seen the biggest growth in population and in diversity, we also should see a growth in real political representation.

It is also important to note that fair redistricting does not require us to be color blind; a fair congressional map for Ohio is one that reflects the diversity of our communities. Just as going outside in a thunderstorm with your eyes closed won't keep you from getting wet, drawing maps with race data "turned off" doesn't mean you won't be held responsible for diluting the voting power of communities of color.

Fair redistricting processes must include the acknowledgement of how diverse communities need and want to be represented, as part of the work to develop district maps that are both responsive to and reflective of the communities in their state.

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Reflecting How We Vote

As mentioned before, our congressional map is one of the most gerrymandered in the country. Despite the fact that Republicans have only won 54% of the statewide share of our vote across the last decade, they occupy a staggering 75% of our congressional seats. That sort of discrepancy between how Ohioans vote and who gets elected means we are essentially taking voters out of the political equation. It is not us who elects our representatives, it is our gerrymandered lines that do so. That's not how democracy should work.

A fair map would rectify partisan gerrymandering and would instead reflect our partisan balance with 7 Democratic seats and 8 Republican seats. The map would also contain multiple competitive seats to reflect the swing nature of our state. Ohio is a purple state with voters who have supported both Democratic and Republican voters statewide - our districts should reflect how Ohio's communities vote, including some areas with truly competitive seats.

For more than two years, my job has been to lead our organizing efforts to prepare Ohioans to engage at every step of the redistricting process. Redistricting is, after all, ultimately about the people and it is all of us who should be centered in any conversation about what's at stake for the next ten years under newly-drawn maps.

Unfortunately, my job has been made immeasurably more difficult because of lackluster attempts to host the open, transparent, and people-powered process that Ohioans clearly demanded through our reforms and that our state constitution requires. For example, we were required to submit testimony for today's hearing *before* the sponsor testimony hearings for both the Democratic- and Republican-proposed map bills. That means we were required to submit testimony on maps we have yet to see, making it extremely difficult to provide full analysis or insight about whether the proposed map meets the needs of our communities.

Nevertheless, Ohioans have met the moment and continue to show up to fight for the process and for the maps that we deserve. Our activists - many of whom would've loved to have been here today but couldn't given time and location constraints - are dedicated to a future in Ohio where our government works for, serves, and represents all of us. They are committed to fighting for our communities, to ensure they have the political representation they deserve, and that our democracy in Ohio is strong.

From day one, All On The Line and our activists have advocated for two things: an open, transparent process and fair maps for Ohio. Maps that keep our communities together, that provide real pathways to political representation for communities of color, and that reflect how we actually vote. In other words, we are asking for maps that look nothing like our current ones.

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Our congressional redistricting process to date has been, to put it lightly, disappointing. While the Senate Democratic caucus has twice shown us that it was quite possible to have submitted a map in a timely manner in compliance with constitutional deadlines, we have seen delay after delay from Republicans. And despite the resounding message that Ohio's voters delivered to all of you through our 2018 reform, this process has not been open, it has not been transparent, it has not been accessible to most Ohioans, and I fear that the outcome will not be a fair map.

In the next 26 days, though, you all have the opportunity to deliver for Ohio. To offer robust public engagement opportunities through hearings - with maps - across the state, outside of daytime working hours, and with virtual testimony options. To deliberate in the open about how best to draw a map that reflects Ohio's communities. And to adopt a map that is fair - not just for one party or the other, not just for a group of special interest, but for all Ohioans. We will be here fighting every step of the way. We hope you'll join us in the fight for fair maps.