

Christopher M. Duke

Ohio Apportionment Board Testimony

My name is Christopher Duke. I am from Beach City, Ohio which is in Stark County. I am a student at The University of Akron pursuing my Master's Degree in Applied Politics. Thank you for having these hearings. Transparency is beneficial to the citizens of Ohio. For far too long the process of redistricting has occurred in the preverbal back room free of any scrutiny from the public.

Districts often are unnecessarily spread across county lines due to gerrymandering for political purposes. This blatantly violates one of the key principals of Democracy- fairness. Cracking is often used to dilute a political party statewide. For example, the Twenty Seventh Ohio Senate District (Summit County- Senator Frank LaRose) is shaped in such a way with irregular boundaries as to give the majority party the advantage. In the process adjoining neighborhoods and communities in the Akron area are represented in Columbus by two different State Senate Districts. The other District the Twenty-Eighth State Senate District is shared with largely rural Portage County. Another example is the boundary between Thirty- First State Senate District (Senator Tim Schaffer) and the Seventeenth State Senate District (Senator David T. Daniels) in Pickaway County. This boundary is drawn very irregularly and leads to neighbors who have the same concerns have two different representatives in the Ohio Senate. This may sound like a good thing but unfortunately two is not better than one due to voter confusion.

Another example of gerrymandering is packing. Packing makes super "safe" seats in our legislative body. In 2006 and 2010, Ohio State Senator Shirley A. Smith averaged over eighty percent of the vote. Looking back even farther, in 2002, the results in this district were not much different. Former State Senator C.J. Prentiss also won election with over eighty percent of the vote. Many Districts are designed as safe seats for one party or another. While many results are not as one sided, victory is assured for one party or the other at the expense of competitive elections.

First and foremost, the Apportionment Board should post drafts of redistricting maps online two weeks before the October 1 deadline to allow for the public to make comments and suggestions. It also allows the Board time to make improvements to the maps based on public input. There is no shortage of good ideas that are offered from the citizens. The League of Women Voters of Ohio, alongside Ohio Citizen Action, and a host of other organizations are sponsoring a redistricting competition that allows for citizens to redraw district boundaries. The maps were unveiled on Wednesday and are available at www.drawthelineohio.org. Maps can help guide a constructive conversation. It is hard to testify about redistricting without maps to comment on. I look forward to seeing your proposed maps.