

Ohio Campaign for Accountable Redistricting

*A project of the League of Women Voters of Ohio Education Fund and Ohio Citizen Action
Supported by the Joyce Foundation and Midwest Democracy Network*



Testimony of Jim Slagle, Ohio Campaign for Accountable Redistricting

**Before the State Government and Elections Sub-Committee on Redistricting
and the Senate Select Committee on Redistricting - July 20, 2011**

The Ohio Campaign for Accountable Redistricting is a coalition of over twenty Ohio organizations who are interested in promoting fair and accountable redistricting.

The League of Women Voters of Ohio and Ohio Citizen Action initiated this effort in partnership with the Midwest Democracy Network. The following additional organizations have joined as partners: Common Cause of Ohio, Ohio Votes, Kid's Voting Central Ohio, Progress Ohio, Ohio NOW Education and Legal Fund, No Labels, Organize Ohio, NAACP, Hocking-Athens-Perry Community Action, Miami Valley Voter Protection Coalition, Clean Fuels Ohio, ACLU, Ohio Center for Progressive Leadership, The Cleveland Coalition, Ohio Environmental Council, Applied Information Resources, Ohio Voice, Ohio Association of Non-Profit Organizations, NARAL Pro-Choice Ohio, American Association of University Women, The CHANGE Agency, LULAC – Ohio, and America Votes - Ohio.

While redistricting has historically been a practice where the political party in power attempts to gain the greatest possible political advantage, today is a new day. Modern computer technology allows this process to be opened up to private citizens, and for redistricting to take place in a non-partisan manner which benefits the public.

Yesterday, we launched a competition which allows private citizens to go to our website (www.drawthelineohio.org) and draw legislative and congressional districts using publicly available software and the same census and election data that the Legislature and Apportionment Board will use. These plans will be scored using objective nonpartisan criteria:

- (1) Preserving County Boundaries** -- measuring the number of counties which are unnecessarily split into separate districts. This helps keep communities of interest together and makes it easier for citizens to understand in which district they live.
- (2) Compactness** – measuring the geographical compactness of the districts. This discourages bizarrely-shaped legislative districts which unnecessarily spread voters apart.

(3) Competitiveness – measuring the number of districts which are truly competitive. This gives Ohioans a stronger voice in choosing their representatives.

(4) Representational Fairness – measuring the degree to which a plan unfairly favors one political party over another. This encourages plans in which the number of districts which favor each political party reflects the statewide political balance.

We will award prizes to the winners and will submit the highest scoring plans to the Legislature and Apportionment Board for consideration. This is an opportunity for direct citizen participation in democracy. In 2009, the League of Women Voters, Ohio Citizen Action, and others joined with the Ohio Secretary of State to sponsor a competition to draw congressional districts. The 2009 competition demonstrated that plans created by private citizens could be evaluated using nonpartisan criteria and the plans created by private citizens were markedly better than what had been drawn through the political process.¹

We request that you promote fair and impartial redistricting by doing the following:

- Invite your constituents to participate in our redistricting competition.
- Encourage the Legislature and Apportionment Board to give fair consideration to plans developed through the competition.
- Support the use of objective nonpartisan criteria for the establishment of new legislative and congressional districts in this year's redistricting process.
- Insist that proposed redistricting plans be published on a publicly accessible website for two weeks prior to being voted on, so that there is an opportunity for proposed plans to be publicly evaluated.
- Support amending Ohio's Constitution to reform our redistricting process, so that future redistricting will take place in an objective nonpartisan manner.

There is general consensus that Ohio's redistricting process needs reformed. The major Ohio newspapers have consistently issued editorials in support of a nonpartisan redistricting process. The public is tired of politics as usual. Significant progress was made in the last session of the General Assembly when separate bills to reform redistricting were passed by the House and Senate before the process stalled (S.J.R. 5, H.J.R. 15). There is an opportunity for public officials to take the lead on this issue by insisting that this year redistricting is accomplished in a manner which benefits the public instead of the political leaders.

¹ Attached is additional information which shows some examples of how our current districts measure up.

How Our Current Districts Stack Up

By: Ohio Campaign for Accountable Redistricting (www.drawthelineohio.org)

County Boundaries

- Our current congressional districts split counties 44 times. In comparison, the 2009 redistricting competition resulted in congressional district plans with only seven and eight county splits.
- The 13th and 17th congressional districts each include parts of four counties without including even a single complete county.

Compactness

- The quickest way to drive from one end of the 6th congressional district (near Youngstown) to the other end (Lucasville) is to leave the district and drive through 9 other congressional districts. From the northern end of the district, it takes less time to drive to Canada than it takes to drive to the southern end of the district.¹
- A bridge across the Sandusky Bay is all that connects the eastern and western parts of the 9th congressional district.

Competitiveness

- In 70 of Ohio's 99 state house districts, the winner had a margin of more than 20% of the vote in last year's election.
- Only three of the 33 state senate districts were decided by less than 10% of the vote in the 2008 and 2010 elections. During the past decade, only 29% of Ohio's state senate elections were decided by less than 20% of the vote.²

Representational Fairness

- In 2006, even though a majority of Ohioans voted for the Democratic congressional candidate, a Republican congressman was elected in 11 of the 18 districts.³
- All three congressmen representing Franklin County are Republicans, even though nearly half of Franklin County voters voted for a Democratic candidate for Congress in 2010.
- In 18 of the last 20 statewide elections, the political party which won the majority of the state representative races, was the party which drew the district lines.

¹ See <http://www.mapquest.com>. The fastest route from Boardman to Lucasville covers 258 miles in 4:35 traveling mostly by interstate through the following districts (17, 13, 16, 4, 12, 15, 7, 18, 2), which is eleven minutes longer than it takes to drive to Niagara Falls, Ontario. To drive from Boardman to Lucasville without leaving the 6th district takes 5:43 (286 miles).

² All election results cited herein are available at <http://www.sos.state.oh.us/SOS/elections/electResultsMain>.

³ The current Ohio congressional delegation is 72% Republican (13 – 5), even though only 57% of Ohio voters voted for a Republican candidate for congress in 2010.