

Testimony by Stephen Gabor, Ohio Citizen Action
Before the Ohio House State Government and Elections Subcommittee on Redistricting
and the Ohio Senate Select Committee on Redistricting
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Good morning. My name is Stephen Gabor and I am the Cleveland Area Campaign Director for Ohio Citizen Action. Founded in 1975, Ohio Citizen Action has 80,000 members.

Gerrymandering has a long history and can seem as American as apple pie. For almost 200 years, the gerrymander has remained one of the best known political cartoons. Patrick Henry was opposed to the new U.S. Constitution which was crafted by another founding father James Madison. Patrick Henry attempted to draw district lines to deny a seat in the first Congress to James Madison. Henry made sure that Madison's district included counties who were likely to oppose him. Fortunately, Henry's attempt at drawing lines didn't keep Madison out of office. Unfortunately, our long history of manipulating district lines to disadvantage unwanted incumbents or the minority political party is not good for representative democracy.

Our representatives set many of the rules by which we live. In large and small ways, they affect our daily lives. It is time to move beyond business as usual. 2011 can be a new beginning. I strongly urge the legislature to craft districts that benefit the public. Focus on compactness, competitive districting and good minority representation (the Voting Rights Act).

My work at Ohio Citizen Action focuses on organizing community members. It is difficult to engage citizens in the political process and mobilize the community when the community is fractured. Imagine encouraging people to contact their Representative. Dividing communities can make it very difficult to identify the appropriate Rep. This can truly discourage, rather than encourage participation. Nearby Summit County, for example, is broken up into three Congressional districts. The 17th District includes parts of Summit, Portage, Trumbull and Mahoning Counties. The 13th District includes parts of Summit, Cuyahoga, Lorain and Medina Counties.

If you truly want maps that benefit the public, it makes sense to request public input during the final stages of map selection. It's time to learn from the mistakes of the past—focus on the voters' needs, rather than those of the incumbents or the political parties.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify.