



TESTIMONY

Joint Legislative Task Force on Redistricting Procedures

COMMON CAUSE OHIO

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Chair of the State Governing Board

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Common Cause Ohio

Background

Mr. Chairman. Thank you for the opportunity to make a presentation before the *Joint Legislative Task Force on Redistricting* procedures in Ohio. My name is William K. Woods, and I am chair of the Governing Board of Common Cause Ohio

Common Cause is a nonpartisan, nonprofit citizen advocacy organization founded in 1970 by John Gardner as a vehicle for citizens to make their voices heard in the political process and to hold their elected leaders accountable to the public interest. Now with nearly 400,000 members and supporters and 36 state organizations, Common Cause remains committed to honest, open and accountable government, as well as encouraging citizen participation in democracy.

Common Cause Ohio is working to hold power accountable at the state and local levels. To that end, we are active on a number of critical issues including election and redistricting reform, and campaign finance reform. In fact, leaders of Common Cause/national and here in Ohio believe that redistricting reform and campaign finance reform, especially the public financing of elections, are keys to renewing our democratic process and restoring people's confidence in politics and government.

Common Cause Ohio is a participating member in "Draw the Line". A collaboration with the League of Women Voters of Ohio and Ohio Citizen Action are working together to "Draw the Line" by launching a competition where private citizens can draw maps of congressional districts and state legislative districts using publicly available software and the same population and voting data used by public officials. *The plans will be scored by objective criteria: preserving county boundaries; compactness; competitiveness; and representational fairness.*

The goal of Draw the Line Ohio is to educate Ohioans about the serious implications of Ohio's highly partisan redistricting process, build consensus around specific redistricting reform measures, and build a base for future reform of redistricting standards.

Winning plans will be submitted to the Ohio Apportionment Board and Ohio legislature for their consideration before they establish new districts.

Introduction

We are here today to talk to you about redistricting in Ohio, and to give you our suggestions about how to conduct a redistricting process that is open and fair and that will produce legislative districts best suited to the citizens of Ohio rather than to elected officials or political parties. Let me say right at the start, Ohio begins this process with a politically partisan redistricting structure that designates the Legislature and an Apportionment Board comprised of state elected officials to draw the lines for Congressional and state legislative districts. Because one political party can often dominate this process, the public perception is and the reality often is a system where politicians pick their voters rather than a system that best responds to the will of the people.

Last year (2010), both Houses of the General Assembly crafted bills that dramatically reformed redistricting in Ohio. Although not perfect, these bills would have improved the structure and method of redistricting in the state. Common Cause Ohio worked with Citizen Action and the League of Women Voters of Ohio to champion this legislation. Unfortunately, the House and the Senate never came together to reconcile the differences in their bills, and a major step forward was not taken. Nevertheless, Common Cause Ohio and its reform allies will continue to work to bring about a non-partisan and transparent redistricting system in this state. We also support the use of computer science to create state and Congressional districts that reflect communities of interest, geographic integrity, and the potential for competitive campaigns for office.

Hope for reform exists. With the support of Common Cause and many other groups, a redistricting reform initiative was passed by California voters in 2010. A non-partisan commission is currently at work in California determining that state's new political boundaries.

Recommendations for Conducting the Current Process in Ohio

The reality is that the State Apportionment Board and the Legislature will conduct Ohio's redistricting process in 2011. We are pleased that this body, the Joint Legislative Task Force on Redistricting Procedures, is here in Cincinnati and other communities throughout Ohio listening to citizens concerns, and we hope that these meetings augur a process that will be transparent and open to citizen engagement. Here follows a little advice from Common Cause Ohio about this critical procedure. This advice includes the organization's values for conducting any public process as well as certain criteria for establishing new legislative districts.

We support a process that is governed by these values: Transparency, procedural fairness, fidelity to the rule of law, and citizen engagement. Transparency means a process of redistricting that is open and accessible to the public. Regardless of location, Ohioans should be able to see what is happening in the redistricting process from beginning to

end.

Procedural fairness means that those charged with redrawing the district maps must adhere to an established, accepted, set of rules and procedural guidelines. In simple terms, it means law makers must make sure citizens know the "who, when, and how" that will govern the redistricting process. Fidelity to the rule of law must also guide those charged with the responsibility of establishing new legislative districts.

Finally, citizen engagement is critical to a fair redistricting process. When citizens are not engaged in the political process, when citizens are deprived of their voice and a seat at the table, democracy suffers. Individuals and groups not working in the best interests of the public will seek to manipulate the process to meet their own narrow agenda and aims. Common Cause is committed to engaging citizens everywhere around the redistricting process so that their individual and collective voice is heard.

Criteria for Drawing the Lines

Common Cause/Ohio, along with its other civic allies, recommends the following criteria for drawing the lines for legislative districts that enhance rather than diminish the democratic process. They include a commitment to geographic integrity and recognizing the importance of communities of interest, and the need for politically competitive districts.

Geographic integrity means more than geographic compactness. A certain measure of compactness is necessary for a workable legislative district, and strangely shaped districts often emerge to insure the success of one of the two major political parties. However, beyond geographic compactness, the existence of communities of interest also needs to be considered when drawing district maps. Examples of communities of interest would be Cincinnati and its immediate suburbs and Greater Columbus. Present Congressional lines divide these two metropolitan areas, and the case can be made that this fact diminishes their potential voices as significant communities of interest in Ohio.

A criterion that is often not considered in the redistricting process is creating politically competitive districts. Why is this factor important? If we cherish democracy and the active participation of citizens in the electoral process, then potentially competitive Congressional and state legislative districts should be a priority in the redistricting process. Nothing can be more discouraging to a citizen than to know that his or her particular views will never be represented in Congress or the Ohio General Assembly. The Second Congressional District, where I live, offers an example of a district that has been a lopsidedly Republican district for my entire life as a voter. If we want to improve the health of democracy in Ohio than one way to do this is to create more truly competitive districts.

Thank you again for this opportunity to present the positions Of Common Cause Ohio. If any members of the task force has any questions or comments I will do my best to address them.