



**Testimony on Congressional Redistricting  
Congressional Redistricting Reform Working Group  
Sarah Spence, Director of Government Affairs  
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Good morning. I'm Sarah Spence, Director of Government Affairs for the Ohio Environmental Council. Thank you for allowing me to speak on behalf of the need for Congressional redistricting reform in Ohio.

You may be wondering why redistricting matters to the environment, and why the Ohio Environmental Council would choose to get involved in the Fair Districts = Fair Ohio ballot initiative. It's simple - redistricting determines who gets elected to Congress, and who sets the congressional policy agenda.

Lines can be drawn to protect or endanger a member. Members in safe districts are often less accountable to voters. However, even in "safe" districts, current members are now being pressured to compromise less and pander more to the extremes of each party for fear of primary challengers. The voices of everyday voters get lost even further in the hyper-partisan bickering.

In a recent survey and focus group testing done for the OEC, 76% of Ohioans support renewable energy, 69% support the closing of old coal plants, and 93% support the protection of customer freedom to meet their own energy needs. Yet, we continue to see federal legislation and policies that are contrary to these beliefs. Ohio's delegation, all of whom won with at least 62% of the vote in 2016, can support or even champion these types of legislation despite widespread voter support of the opposite.

Proactive environmental action will only happen when decision-makers have to listen to their constituents. There is a lot of support across Ohio for pro-environmental action, but the way that the districts are drawn prevents that. The vast majority of Ohio's delegation, whether Republican or Democrat, are essentially done campaigning after the primary. Consider the following:

- No congressional seat has changed political parties since 2012
- In 2014, the closest race was decided by 20.3 points. Three-quarters of the races were decided by 30 points or more.
- In 2016, the closest race was decided by 18.4 points. The average margin of victory of the 16 Congressional seats was 36.3 points.

And on a personal note, I've grown up working in politics. I've had the privilege to volunteer on many campaigns, including congressional ones. My first job out of college was managing a congressional campaign. I will never forget getting to sit down with my candidate, without the consultants or party officials in the room, and asking why he was running for Congress. I was hoping to get an insight into his thinking that I could sell to our volunteers, donors, and eventually, the district's voters. However, what I got was my first real insight into the reality of political gerrymandering. His answer - "because apparently it's my turn to be the sacrificial lamb."

Any hopes of being able to tell voters his policy ideas, his philosophical beliefs in smaller, more efficient government, his passion for improving the quality of life for the district, and the ways those ideas would translate into more economic freedom and jobs died right there in the campaign office. The campaign wasn't about issues, or policies, or what the district voters wanted, it was about how much money we could make the opponent spend.

Isn't it time for a change? Isn't it time that we stop running scared of voters by grouping them together to advance a certain party, instead of giving them an actual reason to vote for a candidate?

According to recent polls, at least 75% of Ohioans want redistricting reform. The state-level system passed in 2015 is a great place to start. We encourage this working group to strengthen Ohio's districts by minimizing the splitting of counties, municipalities and townships. Communities deserve to be whole, voting with one voice for the candidate who will best represent them, not their political party.

Thank you for allowing me to speak to you today on the need for redistricting reform. We look forward to assisting the working group in coming up with a fair solution for all Ohioans. I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.