



Ohio Environmental Council

**Testimony of the Ohio Environmental Council
In Support of the Ohio Citizens' Redistricting Commission's Unity Map
And Opposing the Map Currently Considered by the Ohio Redistricting Commission**

To the honorable members of the Ohio Redistricting Commission:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony for your consideration. I am Chris Tavenor, Staff Attorney for the Ohio Environmental Council (the "OEC"). Ten years ago, when Ohio last considered its legislative district maps, I wasn't even yet old enough to vote. I came of age during a tumultuous economic recession, watching the impacts of perpetual war overseas while becoming increasingly worried about the looming threat of the climate crisis. And for the past ten years, I've seen Ohio ignore the risks of environmental injustice. Ohio's legislators do not act in response to the will of its electorate.

The hopelessly partisan gerrymandering conducted upon Ohio led to egregious harms to the state and its people, like the bribery scandal of House Bill 6. House Bill 6 eviscerated our renewable portfolio standards and energy efficiency standards. It has weakened our state's power to fight the causes of climate change. That legislation revealed how our statehouse, and its districts, are captured by external interests and swayed by money, rather than their constituents. When districts become unresponsive to the will of their voters, with elections decided during primaries, rather than general elections, it becomes easier and easier for politicians to cater to their funders, rather than the people.

I am proud to work for the OEC in the fight for a healthy environment for all who call Ohio home. This year, we are talking about redistricting. The OEC advocates on behalf of a healthy democracy, because without a healthy democracy, we cannot create policies that benefit the people of Ohio. We cannot ensure clean water, vibrant public lands, renewable energy, and a stable climate. The OEC works with its partners in the Equal Districts Coalition to fight for fair and representative maps because future generations depend on a democracy that fights for their communities and their environment, rather than partisan interests.

Ohioans want fair districts. They want districts, and thus representatives, that reflect their perspectives, lived experiences, and communities. The constitutional amendment passed in 2015 enshrined these values through requiring "representational fairness." The constitutional amendment changing our redistricting process passed with overwhelming margins.

The OEC opposes any form of gerrymandering designed to support partisan interests or particular political parties. To that end, we believe the most important rule included in the 2015 constitutional amendment is its commitment to representational fairness. Ohio's legislative maps must represent communities, lived experiences, and geographies, while also creating a legislature that does not favor one party over another through district design.

As the [Ohio Citizens' Redistricting Commission \(the "OCRC"\) defined it](#), and as supported by the explicit language of the Ohio Constitution, representational fairness must closely reflect the partisan makeup of the state. In the five general elections that have taken place over the past decade, Republican candidates for President, U.S. Senator, Governor, Secretary of State, Auditor, Attorney General and Treasurer have received 54.3% of the votes cast by Ohio voters, while Democratic candidates for those offices have received 45.7% of the votes cast. To ensure that one political party is not unduly favored over another, the partisan make-up of Ohio's districts should mirror the partisan make-up of Ohio's voters.

Today, the Ohio Redistricting Commission received a map from Ohio Senate President Matt Huffman. In the presentation itself, the map's advocates definitively stated that they did not consider the constitutional requirement of representational fairness. And the data confirms the conclusion that their map does not meet the representational fairness requirement.

By quickly using data from <https://www.davesredistricting.org> applied to Senate President Huffman's map, the proposed statehouse districts would result in 68 Ohio House districts favoring the Republican Party (>50% Republican partisan lean), and 31 districts favoring the Democratic Party (>50% Democratic partisan lean). Given the proportion of votes for statewide races over the past decade, this map is, on its face, unconstitutional.

It should be outright rejected.

Instead, the OEC endorses the map submitted to the Ohio Redistricting Commission by the OCRC, available both on the [OCRC's website](#) and this Commission's public submission portal.

In 2021, map drawers should be drawing new districts that are not only representative of Ohio, but are also responsive to the will of Ohio voters. We shouldn't see maps that have anything close to the current lopsided partisan nature of our current ones.

The Unity Map submitted by the OCRC upholds the constitutional requirements, especially the mandatory representational fairness provisions, while also pursuing community derived principles of representation. It strives to keep communities together, reflect the partisan makeup of the state, and give communities of color a real pathway to representation.

Of most importance, the OCRC's map upholds the constitutional requirement of representational fairness. Based on the most recently available data on partisan leans for population blocks, it creates a map with 55 districts with >50% Republican partisan lean and 44 districts with >50% Democratic lean. The Unity Map will create a framework and atmosphere for genuine compromise and policymaking, setting the groundwork for real progress on issues like climate change and guaranteeing environmental justice for all.

Environmental injustice is the disproportionate exposure of communities of color and low-income communities to environmental hazards such as air pollution, toxic wastewater, and lead exposure. Last week, the OEC's Environmental Policy Fellow, Callia Téllez, provided the Ohio Redistricting Commission with testimony on the environmental injustices faced by the people of Dayton. For example, current House District 39, where the majority of black and brown Daytonians reside, experiences significant environmental injustice. It holds a disproportionate amount of EJ-Screen blocks that are in the 95-100th percentile for superfund proximity, lead paint exposure, and National Air Toxics Assessment cancer risk. The environmental injustices faced by residents of District 39 are unacceptable.

District lines crack the communities surrounding parts of Trotwood, Fort McKinley, Fairview and North Riverdale, so while these communities in District 43 are experiencing the same environmental injustices

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as those in District 39, their district is pulled out to the Indiana border, diluting their voices with Ohioans who do not experiences the same hazardous exposures.

Without a functioning and fair democracy, Ohio will continue to perpetuate environmental injustice. The passage of environmental protection laws should never become a partisan political tool as if we are not debating real human lives in our communities.

Under our current maps, Ohio has many districts that crack apart communities and connect disparate communities with wildly different environmental experiences and resource access. The deliberate cracking of communities dilutes the power Ohioans have to advocate for their right to clean air, safe drinking water, and a fair democracy.

The map submitted by Ohio Senate President Matt Huffman perpetuates these cracked and packed districts. It will perpetuate environmental injustice. The Unity Map of the OCRC upholds the spirit and literal language of the 2015 constitutional amendment, creating a district map furthering the will of Ohio voters.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

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