

Ohio Redistricting Commission - 8-23-2021 - Youngstown .mp4

Co-Chair, Senator Vernon Sykes [00:00:09] Those who are not present here today, we are so thankful that we're here at Youngstown State University and to greet us the host is President Jim Tressel.

Tressel [00:00:22] Thank you, Mr. Senator [applause] thank you, on behalf of our entire YSU family and the Mahoning Valley, we're excited that this discussion is here. We believe that a university is a wonderful place to have discussions. In fact I happen to think that a university is unity in diversity and we get a chance to share what we think with one another in a thoughtful manner. And so we're excited to be able to host this. I can assure you we'll get some sound here pretty soon. If not, we'll have some new sound managers. [laughter] Just kidding. But we appreciate it. It's a busy time on college campuses getting ready for school to begin, and we just had the naming of our new excellence training center, Kohli Hall, which will meet the workforce needs of the future. So we just had a big day and got a lot of things going on. Just wanted to stop and welcome you. And we're glad you're here and enjoy the afternoon. Thank you sir.

Co-Chair, Senator Vernon Sykes [00:01:30] Thank you. Thank you, will the staff please call the roll.

Roll Call [00:01:38] Co Chair, Senator Vernon Sykes, (present), Representative, Tim Ginter (present), designee for Co-Chair Robert Cupp (present), Matt Donahue, designate for Governor Mike DeWine. (present) Auditor Keith Faber (present), we have Merle Madrid designee for Secretary Frank LaRose, (present), we have Representative Michele Lepore-Hagan, designee for Leader Emilia Sykes, (present), And we have Senator Kirk Schuring designee for President Matt Huffman (here).

Co-Chair, Senator Vernon Sykes [00:02:18] We have a quorum present and we will move forward. I know...anyone that would like to testify today, we ask that you please fill out a witness list so that we can record it accordingly. In November of 2015, Ohio voters approved a constitutional amendment that implemented a new General Assembly redistricting process and established the Ohio Redistricting Commission. The commission consists of the governor, state auditor, secretary of state and one commissioner appointed by each of the legislative leaders of the two largest political parties in the Ohio House and the Ohio Senate. Four in total, one from each of the caucuses. The commission has until September 1st of this year to pass a plan with the votes of at least two members affiliated with each of the major parties. If they fail to do that, then by September 15th they may pass a map with the simple majority, just four votes. And that map would last for only four-year period. The Ohio legislative process, redistricting process, is one has taken place really in all the states around the country and is based on the census. The United States Department of Commerce published census data, so we have new numbers so we can configure the districts appropriately. In Ohio, the population was eleven thousand eleven million seven hundred ninety-nine thousand four hundred forty-eight people, a two point three percent growth over 2010. And that means for each of the House districts we have one hundred and nineteen thousand one hundred and eighty-six people, and in each of the Senate districts will have three hundred and fifty-seven thousand five hundred and fifty nine persons, with the five percent deviation. Legislative districts are complex— is more than just putting the right number of people in each one of the districts. There are several layers of complex requirements, including the district population requirements, rules on how to prioritize splits, political subdivisions and additional district standards dealing with favoring or disfavoring political parties and compactness of districts. The board also has to

comply with all federal regulations and guidelines, the Ohio Constitution and including the Voting Rights Act, on the federal level. These, we are going to when we can, get information broadcast here today. We had a hearing earlier today in in Cleveland and we will have a series of hearings all over the state all of this week, a total of ten. And we encouraging you to look at the website that we have www.redistricting.Ohio.gov for additional information or to submit written testimony or even submit maps. The purpose, the main purpose today since we're right up on the deadline for the House and district state maps that we are addressing the state legislative maps at this particular time. Today we're here to listen to you. We're not here to debate one another. We're here to get as much information as we can about how districts affect you and get input from you to use in formulation of the plan. Before we begin, we just want to make sure that you know that the written testimony will be available and able to be submitted on the website. With that if no other statements by any of the other members. We'd like to move to the first person to testify, Mr. John Bocchieri. Thank you.

Bocchieri [00:07:23] Thank you. Members of the Ohio Redistricting Commission bringing this public hearing to Mahoning County, performing your constitutional duties in the open so that we may have a discussion about the political future of this community. I have served with all of you at some point over the last 21 years, whether in the state legislature, or in our nation's capital. I've known all of you to be honorable in your public service and its approach. We passed legislation together. We worked together to help Ohioans after natural disasters and in their time of greatest need. I acknowledge your honorable service. However, when it comes to campaigns, Ohioans acknowledge that the process which legislative and congressional districts are drawn, and have been drawn, demonstrates your political muscle versus fairness. Simply put, past maps have not been drawn as honorably as your individual service. Past commissions have packed and cracked communities like mine, lumping vast numbers of voters in the districts that do not follow the fairness model in which comprises competitiveness, keeping cities whole, and representational fairness. It is clear that Ohio politicians are picking the people they want to represent versus people picking politicians they want representing them in government. It seems from this process, which in the days of Governor Jim Rhodes and Speaker Vern Riffe saw maps that were drawn with little...number 2 pencils, after much consensus, to maps now that are drawn with laser 3-D printers built from the ground up in political districts that favor the majority. This process should be about... shouldn't be about politics, but it should be about fairness. Don't get me wrong, both Democrats and Republicans are doing this all over the country. But Ohio hasn't witnessed fairness in decades. When first elected to the Ohio House, the legislative map for the 57th district stretched from the suburbs of Youngstown to Carrollton in Carroll County. In 2002, when the new map was redrawn, the 61st Ohio House district extended further south, including slivers of Mahoning County, Stark County, all of Carroll County and a sliver of Tuscarawas County all the way past New Philadelphia. The most populous counties in that redrawn district with a sliver of Stark County, which was now the newly configured 61st district. It had appeared from the district that was redrawn... it was drawn mainly to weaken the representative's political influence versus strengthening the political voice of citizens across the district. In 2002, while in the Ohio House, the majority eliminated the congressional district of then Congressman Jim Traficant. Now, that was an easy political move because Congressman Traficant had just been convicted of a felony and subsequently removed from the seat by a vote of his peers in the US House. However, the voices of Valley residents were now packed together into the 6th Congressional District, comprising 12 counties, one county wide, all the way down the Ohio River to Portsmouth and Scioto County. Speaker Larry Householder often referred to this district as the "sliver on the river." Mahoning County, the 10th most populous county in the state, was now cracked and packed into smaller

communities in an unfamiliar configuration drawn for political considerations and not for the needs of its citizens. There are some who suggest that the '02 [inaudible] map was fair because I won a seat in the 16th Congressional District against my esteemed colleague here who is an honorable gentleman in that race in the congressional district that hadn't seen a Democrat elected in 60 years. However, political reality soon set in after the 2010 election, Senator Schuring, when all the districts that saw different representatives soon put back to their original configurations were [?] their intended political representation. And in fact, the League of Women Voters of Ohio and Common Cause identified an important fact about that 2012 map. There was a sliver of Canton, they call it a puppet, I quote, a puppet shaped peninsula which was carved into the 16th district, a former district that I represented, that attached Canton to the district. The total population in that peninsula was zero. No other portion of Canton is in the 16th Congressional District. The zero-population area was attached to the 16th District, according to League of Women Voters, because it contained Timken manufacturing plants and their corporate headquarters, according to the League of Women Voters. Now there was no coincidence about that political move, however, I will draw your attention to that same 12 political map. A little nodule extending from the crack and packed 13th Congressional district that extended to the Stark County ultimately will be won by Congressman Tim Ryan. The majority conveniently drew my home, which was in Alliance, at that time, into the congressional district, attempting to pit us against one another, No one a part [?] of Stark County [?] is in the 13th Congressional district. My plea to all of you today, to my esteemed colleague, is to stop this madness. What I have learned by both winning and losing elections is that people want their elected representatives to reduce the political fighting and maximize their political voices in our capitol. This could not be achieved when partisan, partisans draw districts that favor political gains instead of gaining political influence for citizens of Ohio. The number of wave elections, national wave elections over the last 15 years is testimony in itself to citizens displeasure at this very process, drawing districts where a politician just has to worry about winning their primary election, has reduced the effectiveness of our institutions. Sure, it permits the majority to hold on to power, but it dilutes the discourse within these institutions and creates hyper-partisan rhetoric that weakens our ability to speak to one another. Fair district maps allow for consideration of opposing, opposing political views and the building of consensus, which is at the heart of our democracy. If we are truly about winning elections on ideas then let our campaign be about that, instead of a predetermined map that was delivered to maximize political opportunities. The data and demographics support the premise that the Mahoning Valley deserves its own congressional district and statehouse districts. Many of our citizens feel as if Columbus has forgotten about us. You have the chance to demonstrate that fair districts create fair government for all Ohio citizens. Thank you, Senator. I appreciate your time. [applause]

Co Chair, Senator Vernon Sykes [00:14:23] Thank you, Mr. Boccieri, are there any questions of Mr. Boccieri? Seeing none, thank you so much, appreciate it. Please forgive me in advance if I happen to stumble a little over a few names, Janice Simmons-Mortimer.

Simmons-Mortimer [00:14:54] My name is Janice, I'm from the Ohio District 76 and the Senate district 18 in Hiram Township. What you just heard right there and what you heard this morning, you got a an earful talking about fair districts from a grand perspective, even from Mahoning County. What I like to talk about as a mom [?] how I feel during [inaudible] Portage County. So where I'm from, northern Portage County. [inaudible] We're a rural community, we're a college town and also have that suburban vibe if you're on the west side. [inaudible] what Portage County doesn't have though, is a strong advocate, a unifying advocate. And that's because we have three U.S. congressional districts and 2 Ohio House districts that carve up our county. What has that led to? I feel like it's led to

inaccurate [?] representation when it comes to things such as health care and access [inaudible] when it comes to resources like libraries systems that have such poor funding, I think Portage County is at least 3rd in least funding for library systems. And also public education. And that's where my heart is at and why I want to talk to you about. When I compare through Ohio Department of Education preparedness grade for students...[loud feedback]

Co-Chair, Senator Vernon Sykes [00:16:41] They're at least working on it.

Simmons-Mortimer [00:16:45] A sign from God He's listening. [laughter] [applause] The Ohio Department of Education preparedness grades for students in northern Portage County school districts with those of the other districts with which we've been combined. Neighbors to the north, the impacts and differences are startling. Less than 50 percent of students in the three rural districts included in Portage County, less than 50 percent of students going to college, less than 30 percent graduate with a college degree in six years. One of those districts, in particular, Windham, has less than 20 percent of students who graduate with a college degree after 6 years. Less than 20 percent. Now, compare that with our neighbors to the north, in Geauga County. 73 percent of their students go into college. Fifty-one percent graduate with a college degrees in 6 years. If you take Kenston Schools, which is just north of where I'm from, which is an impressive school district, 86 percent of their students go on to college and 68 graduate with a college degree. So we have to look at our students seen as having a high school acting as a terminal degree. Ninety percent of students go into public education. That's why redistricting is so critical for us. The need for quality public education, public education is paramount to the future viability of our communities, of our workforce and of our community's success overall. Unfortunately, by cracking our county and taking our rural district and combining them with even more wealthy and affluent ones to the north, you silence our voices and render our opinions, with our representatives is just useless. Our own vocational school, which is a pipeline for quality jobs for a significant portion of the students in our area, isn't even in our district, and congressional [inaudible] Ohio House. You've taken away the community's voice even when it comes to the one pipeline a majority of our schools go to. Now, personally, I moved from Bainbridge into Hiram in 2010. I spent the last 10 plus years advocating from my home district. I have co-led levy campaigns for new buildings, didn't pass. I have helped with operating levies which is a continual struggle for a farming community, in trying to pass. I've also personally helped bring students into STEM camps and programs elicit the idea of science. It is embarrassing to note that our science labs are less equipped than what my children had in the Kenton district in first grade. We've even done archeological digs for our students in middle school, again trying to build the idea of looking beyond Portage County. I have used my skills, I've used my time, I've used my money to try to work with the teachers and staff in Crestwood schools who are so dedicated to doing what they can do with the limited resources available to them, to give a quality education. I feel like I'm lucky because I have to ability to do that, not very families in Portage County can, that's why I'm coming to you. The most critical things we need you to do is to not split up Portage County. To not break up communities and take our voices away. Yes, the communities of Crestwood and Garrettsville and Windham don't have the population, affluence or clout that a Bainbridge or Chesterland have. We do have pride in our area. We do want a better future for our children. And, we believe that we can do it. You can do it if you give us a representative who also works and listens to us and is an advocate for better. Thank you. [applause]

Co-Chair, Senator Vernon Sykes [00:20:58] Thank you. I'd like to take this time to recognize any other state legislators that are here today. Would you please stand all the

others, legislators, members of the House or the Senate, would you please stand to be recognized? Thank you. [applause]. Next, we will call up is Holly Oyster.

Oyster [00:21:51] ...do we need written testimony that I brought with me? Copies of it,

Co-Chair, Senator Vernon Sykes [00:21:59] the staff will get that for me.

Oyster [00:22:16] Hi, my name is Holly Oyster, I live in Alliance, actually, outside of Alliance, an area called Smith Township. I often refer to our area as the red headed stepchildren of Mahoning County because we are clear at the far corner and I have to drive 40 minutes to an hour to do anything in my county seat. And I do not feel particularly represented when lumped with Youngstown. I'm here today to remind the commission that the work that they are doing right now will directly affect me and my neighbors for the coming decade. If the districts they draw are unfair, their actions will directly result in the negation of my rights as an Ohioan and an American to have my voice heard. In the last ten years, I have felt unrepresented and ignored by my elected officials. I am active locally, helping to organize volunteers interested in supporting progressive issues. I came to this out of frustration that policies being instituted by my government were completely opposed to everything that I believe in. I have reached out to my representatives about issues that are important to me, about bills that are up for consideration, about topics I feel should be addressed. The only response I have ever received was a form letter, and that was a rare occurrence. As a civically engaged Ohioan, it is my responsibility to pay attention to what my government is doing. And if the policies that polls are showing Ohio and support are being passed and implemented by my government. There are so many issues about which I care deeply that are not being supported by my government. For example, various recent polls show that 51.3 percent or more of Americans, depending on what poll you read, support abortion remaining legal in most cases. However, our state government continues to pass unconstitutional laws that limit access to women's health care and repeatedly pass laws criminalizing abortion and those who provide the procedures. This is a failure of democracy. According to the most recent data I have been able to find, Ohio is made up of approximately forty six percent... forty six percent Democrats and fifty three percent Republicans, however, our statehouse has Republican supermajorities in both houses. Republicans hold sixty-four-point six percent of the seats in the Ohio Statehouse and seventy-five-point eight percent of the seats in the Ohio Senate. My Ohio senator does not care what I think...that I am desperate for universal health care, that my husband and I are considering a paper divorce so that I can go on public assistance to afford the medicine my child needs, that our education system is an embarrassment that robs our children of a decent education. He knows his job is secure because the district he nominally represents is drawn in such a way that my voice is ignored, lumping me together with those with whom I have zero in common. My representative doesn't care that I want a vaccine mandate, that I'm worried about the health of my immune compromised teenager, that I'm horrified that our schools don't teach comprehensive sex ed, instead teaching abstinence only, despite hundreds of studies showing such curricula do not reduce teen pregnancy or the spread of STDs. He does not represent me. So far, the process for redistricting has been confusing and vague. Despite an overwhelming, overwhelming majority of Ohioans twice voting to support fair districts, I have little to no confidence that their districts will be drawn. I am here to help ensure that the wishes of Ohioans are followed. Who is working on these maps right now? When will we see them? We need time to be able to assess those maps and determine if they are fair representation of Ohioans and time is running out. I need to know that this process is going to result in fair representation as mandated by the United States Constitution. I need to know that my vote will matter again. I want to know that my community will be included with those that have similar life experience to

me. I live in Mahoning County but have an Alliance address. Most of Alliance is Stark County. If the district is drawn along the county line, I will be voting with people I have no connection with. I need my community in a district with those where I shop, do business and whose kids go to school with my kids. Anything else means my voice and the voices of so many of my neighbors will be silenced. And this is not on my written testimony. But I wanted to add I was going to ask where our governor is today, who is supposed to be here. But I just discovered on Twitter that he's at a Cincinnati Bengals practice right now. Thank you, Governor DeWine.

Co-Chair, Senator Vernon Sykes [00:27:15] Thank you. Thank you very much. Any questions? [applause] Next, presenter is Kathleen Gaige.

Gaige [00:27:36] Good afternoon to all of you and thank you for being here today. My name is Kathleen Shafee-Gaige and I'm a lifelong resident of Mahoning County, Ohio, and the chair of the Voter Services Committee of the League of Women Voters of Greater Youngstown. The league looks forward to a redistricting, a redistricting process which supports a robust democracy. Such a process would result in districts that are comprised of communities of common interest and that are geographically compact. Such districts, regardless of the party affiliations of the people who live in them, would enable elected officials to better represent their constituent's interests. Districts that do not support a robust democracy look like districts Ohio currently has. Many are not comprised of communities of common interests, and many are not geographically compact. They were drawn primarily to advance, to advantage one political party over all others. Mahoning County, by any definition, is a geographically compact area that consists of communities of common interests. As one of many examples, we share this wonderful higher education resource that is hosting this public hearing today. Yet, since the redistricting of 2001, Mahoning County has been divided into two congressional districts, making advocacy for what is best for the entire community difficult. Our battle should be waged over election, elected officials promoting the interests of this region, and that is done best when the county is included in one district. Now, I understand that the redistricting commission does not have a primary role in establishing congressional districts, but you will have a role if the Ohio General Assembly fails to approve new 10-year maps, according to the new established rules. And finally, I would like to emphasize the importance of the commission adhering to the guidance of representational fairness. As you know, this states that the newly drawn state Senate districts and the newly drawn state representative districts in the aggregate should roughly correspond to the preferences of Ohio voters over the previous ten years, as expressed in statewide and federal partisan elections. Now, looking at just a couple of these examples, former President Trump won Ohio in 2020 by a margin of 53/45. So are we a 53 percent Republican state and a 43 percent... excuse me, 53 percent Republican state and 45 percent Democrat state? Governor DeWine won the gubernatorial race in 2018 by a margin of 50/47. So is Ohio a 50 percent Republican state? Forty seven percent Democrat state? Whatever Ohio is, we are not a 76 percent Republican, 24 percent Democrat state, which is the current configuration of the Ohio Senate. [applause] We are not a 65 percent Republican, 35 percent Democrat state, which is the current configuration of the Ohio House. Now in 2015 and 2018. Ohio voters overwhelmingly supported new rules for establishing districts that are intended to make elected officials responsive to their constituents rather than districts that favor any political party over any other. The League of Women Voters of Greater Youngstown and I personally expect those of you responsible for enacting these reforms to adhere to the spirit of their intention. Thank you very much. [applause]

Co-Chair, Senator Vernon Sykes [00:31:28] Thank you. Questions? Carol Canavan.

Canavan [00:31:42] Good afternoon, thank you to the commission for being here today to hear our perspectives on redistricting. I am also a member of the League of Women Voters of Canton and have been a member there for a well over 10 years. I live in Stark County. Again, one of those counties that has been chopped up a little bit. And we all know we've heard that this is damaging to us, the voters. I live in the 50th House district. My home is in Plain Township, North Canton schools, and by one street, the 50th district. I always think of myself as a North Canton resident, primarily because that is where my children went to school. I vote for the school levies and I go to a church right in the heart of this little town of North Canton. It's a very historic town. Hoover, you recognize the name, the 50th includes a large part of Stark County to the east. It is a more rural area in Stark County, but it includes Louisville, Alliance, and Hartville. I have communicated with my representative by email, but I have not met with him personally. And from what I can tell, he is, of course, doing as good a job as he can do as our representative there in Stark County. On the congressional side, and prior to the redistricting done in 2011, I knew who my congressman was. When I first moved to North Canton, I had the task of visiting our congressman, Ralph Regula, in his farm in Devar. We needed him to expedite passport applications so that a group of Stark County students and teachers could visit Russia under a program initiated by the Diebold Corporation. I was impressed by the accessibility of the congressman and his genuine interest in the project that the students were involved in. After 2011, I was amazed at how Stark County, the 16th District in particular, changed shape. I'm part of that peninsula that reaches down to the Timken Company. There are three other districts, of course, in the state, in the county as well. Which, of course, is quite contrary to what we know about [feedback] about what we know of effective representation. The League of Women Voters League of Women Voters is known for offering nonpartisan candidate forums, but it's difficult to get candidates to agree to come to North Canton or to Canton when it's just a tiny part of their district. Why should they be concerned about voters in that little peninsula reaching down to the Timken Company? Other candidates seem not to be interested in holding town halls because their state seats are safe. Candidates of the opposing party have difficulty securing sufficient funding and support to mount a strong campaign, especially in light of the extreme unlikelihood of success in a district arranged to support one party. This leaves voters feeling that their voices cannot be heard, and that leads to apathy and worse. Once when helping register voters at KSU Stark. I talked to a young man who told me flat out that he had no intention of registering to vote and no intention of voting ever. I asked him why and he told me they don't care what I think. My vote won't change anything. To me, that is the saddest statement of our younger generation. When we take away the hope of our youth that they can have an impact on their future by participating in our government and our democratic system, we are really chipping away at the bedrock of democracy. In 2015 and again in 2018, over 70 percent of Ohio voters in all 88 counties voted to have legislation that changes this process. We demand that districts be redrawn in this decennial year, are wonderful opportunity to make these districts fair, to make them truly represent the voters of Ohio. Time is wasting. You know that. We know that. We are wanting you to do the work that the voters of Ohio has demanded and we're watching. So please, get this. [applause]

Co-Chair, Senator Vernon Sykes [00:36:23] Thank you very much. Any questions? See no questions, the next person is Mr. Percy Squire. I believe the mics may be working, (say again?) I believe the mics may be working.

Squire [00:36:54] Yes, sir. Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and members of the commission. I have submitted written comments for inclusion in the record. But I would like to summarize briefly a few issues that I am hopeful the commission will take into account

as it performs its duties that the chair outlined in its opening, in his opening, that you're obliged to do under the recent amendments to the Ohio Constitution. I won't belabor any details concerning the redistricting process. Suffice it to say that the Constitution has been amended, the State Constitution, that is, to require the approach to redistricting that you outlined at the outset, Mr. Chairman, with respect to the Ohio House and Senate. And I also understand the distinction between the redistricting process at the state and that which is required at the federal level. But I do want to say, and I would ask that the commission be mindful of the fact that as you undertake your duties with respect to redistricting, that by reason of the provisions of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 as amended, that your obligation to engage in an intensely local appraisal of indigenous political reality in the Mahoning Valley as you determine where these lines should be drawn. That concept, and I'm not trying to get into a lot of legalese here, but I represent a class of voters in the Mahoning Valley that are protected by the provisions of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 as amended. That class was formerly headed by a gentleman, by the name of Ezell Armour, who filed a lawsuit that resulted in an injunction and the declaratory judgment being issued against The State of Ohio, and that order is codified at five seven seven five FS one zero four four in the opinion of the 6th Circuit Court of Appeals from 1991. Mr. Armour, unfortunately, is no longer with us. But the representatives of that same class are here with us today, Miss Helen Youngblood and the Honorable Kenneth Simon. The appraisal of indigenous political reality in any jurisdiction where lines are being drawn is to be determined in accordance with the concept known as the Totality of Circumstances test. And that legislation sets forth a number of Senate report factors that should be considered in determining whether the political processes leading to the election of representatives of choice are equally open to members of the protected class. The first factor that the commission is required to consider is whether there's been a history of official discrimination in the affected jurisdiction. My clients, nor I, are here today to point the finger at anyone or to take the scab off old wounds, accusing anyone of the racism or historical mistreatment. But it has to be noted, and I'm here to ask you to take account of the fact that in the Armour case, in addition to a determination that there was a violation of the Voting Rights Act, the Sixth Circuit determined that there was a violation of the 15th Amendment. Now, the significance of that is a violation of the 16th and 15th Amendment means the court found not only that there was discrimination that resulted in the political processes not being equally open, but that it was intentional. And the fact that there has been a finding, found in an opinion of the United States Court of Appeals for the 6th Circuit that the state of Ohio intentionally discriminated against the members of the protected class in Mahoning County, should serve as a point of departure and analyzing indigenous political reality today. And that is even more important today, given the fact that the census data was released so late that there isn't going to be much opportunity for this commission to engage in an intensely local appraisal of conditions in the Valley since 1991. So I have attached to the materials provided to this body, a copy of the opinion from the Armour case in 1991, which performs an intensely local appraisal of indigenous political reality in great detail and provides the history of the valley, what's gone on, and so forth. Unfortunately, many of the findings that were made in 1980.. 1991 continue till this day. Specifically, there's never been an African American elected to a countywide office in Mahoning County in history. There's never been an African American elected to countywide office in Trumbull County, in history. There is extreme racially polarized block voting in this jurisdiction. I won't go through all those factors, but they're listed in my materials. Now, in the interest of time, and getting to the bottom line here, what's the upshot of what I'm asking this commission to look at today? Basically, given the history that set forth in the materials that I provided and there's a copy of the Armour opinion here and I ask you to make it part of the record. We've also attached maps showing the distribution of African American voters in the Mahoning Valley. Ninety five percent live in the cities of

Youngstown and Warren. So it's our position that any Senate district that is drawn in the Mahoning Valley that separates the city of Youngstown and Warren, dilutes the votes of the protected class. Secondly, any U.S. House district that separates the city of Youngstown and Warren into two separate US House districts, dilutes the power of the vote of the members of the protected class and will not only violate the Voting Rights Act, but the injunction that was imposed in *Armor* that it's our position, is still in effect today. I thank you for your attention, Mr. Chairman. [applause]

Co-Chair, Senator Vernon Sykes [00:44:52] Thank you for your testimony. We appreciate it. Thank you for bringing it to our attention. Thank you. We will do so. Thank you, sir. Next witness is Bill Patazak.

Patazak [00:45:23] I don't think I want to follow that. Well done, well said. That kind of leaves me speechless. [applause] My name is Bill Patazak, I'd like to thank the commission for being here today, Thomas Jefferson said information is the currency of democracy. And so coming here to hear the voices of our community are so important, and I'd like to once again thank you for doing that. I grew up here in Austintown, most of my life spent there, graduated from Austintown Fitch from this august institution. And so I've been invested in this community my entire life. While growing up here, I had many wonderful state reps, state senators, Ron Gerberry, Bobby Hagan, John Boccieri, just so many, Ken Carano, so many fine elected politicians that were available and accessible and very helpful, active in their communities. But I'm here today, I work for the Ohio Association of Public School Employees. I represent employees in schools except for teachers. And but my main role is I'm for the reason for being here is I'm the president of the Mahoning Trumbull Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO. I'm on the Ohio AFL-CIO executive board. And so I just want to tell you a little bit about all of my members and what gerrymandering has meant to them and how they've become disenfranchised. I have... So I cover Mahoning and Trumbull County and we've seen the change in districts, congressional, state Reps, state Senate. And it's just I have members who live across the street from each other. They work in the same place. They go to the same church, but they have different elected representatives. And I just like to say that it is not beneficial for our democracy when politicians of any party manipulate voting maps to keep themselves and their parties in power. You know, in several times over the years, somebody mentioned this earlier, Ohioans want fair play, fair districts and they voted twice in 2015 and 2018 by over 70 percent to to pass redistricting reforms. Elected officials should respect those votes by providing a transparent process and fair maps. And like the gentleman said earlier, we want to, we're asking that you ensure redistricting to be fair, transparent, nondiscriminatory and politically impartial. Maps should serve the voters, not the other way around, not the political parties or not the interests of parties, not the interests of candidates. It doesn't matter which party does it when there's gerrymandering, it's wrong. So I want to be brief to let everybody else have a chance to speak today. Thank you very much for being here today. [applause]

Co-Chair, Senator Vernon Sykes [00:48:17] Thank you very much. Any questions of the witness? Seeing none, call the next person, Robert Clyde.

Clyde [00:48:35] Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the commission, and I, too, thank you for being here in Youngstown. I'm sorry, however, that there's not a map that we can look at that the census data did come in late, but with the miracle of technology, a lot can be done in a short amount of time. And it wasn't. So I'm wondering if there will be another hearing where we're able to look at a map and instead of discussing this without [applause] any sense of what we're what we're going to end up with? It would be much

more helpful if we could do that with a map. Now, I'm not ashamed to say that I'm a lifelong Democrat and I'm looking at a committee with two Democrats on it and the rest Republicans. And it troubles me. It's it's the way the state has been represented. It troubles me that that has been the case. My daughter served in the Ohio General Assembly as a state representative from Portage County, and she did that until she was term limited and she served with 33 fellow Democrats, maybe one year they were 35, but out of 99, that is a very small minority. And it was very difficult for her to work with Republicans as used to be the case back in the 80s, as I can remember myself, it's no longer, it had been the case. So I would like to see the end of gerrymandering. And I think that was the intent of the constitutional amendment. [applause] And hopefully we can have fair representation, which is called for by the constitutional amendment. I think that's it. I'll be short. And thank you very much for your attention.

Co-Chair, Senator Vernon Sykes [00:50:46] Thank you very much. Are there any questions? The next witness is Bria Bennett.

Bennett [00:51:13] I'm a little short so I will adjust this. Thank you, Senator Sykes, Auditor Faber and all the proxies that are here today, I'm Bria Bennett. I'm a resident of Warren, Ohio. I'm a lifelong resident of Trumbull County. I'm here as a Trumbull County Young Dems vice president. But most of all, I'm here as a fed-up Ohioan. DeWine and LaRose can make their way across the state to campaign to cut ribbons, to hand out vax-a-million winnings, but can't be here today to show up for the future of democracy in our state. [applause] By scheduling these meetings during the day and in the morning and then refusing to show up, they show that they don't really care about us, they just care about what they can get from us. So I thank you for those that are here today. Partisan gerrymandering is the process of unfairly drawing the lines so that a party in power can stay in power and can continue to be reelected. This is a manipulative and methodical drawing of lines. The lines that we currently see are cheating Ohioans. The absence of the people that are in charge of this process does not instill faith that the lines will be redrawn differently or that anything will change after what we have said today. And Ohioans have made it crystal clear time after time that our districts need redrawn. There's no reason that countless Ohio counties should be sliced and diced. There is overwhelming support for redistricting and you've heard a wonderful consensus of that today. So today, starting now, this is the time that we can redraw lines with bipartisan support. Now is the time where we can give Ohioans a fair shot at a fair election by having fair districts. I'll keep it short like everybody else. Thank you very much. [applause]

Co-Chair, Senator Vernon Sykes [00:53:43] Thank you. Any questions for Ms Bennett? Next witness is Anthony Buckman. He's not here. Daniel Newberg. Reverend Nicole Pickens.

Pickens [00:54:43] Thank you for the opportunity to to be with you today. Thank you to the commission for the work that you are putting into this process. I'm Reverend Nicole Pickens. I am an ordained minister with the United Church of Christ, currently actually serving a United Methodist congregation. And I've had the interesting opportunity to to kind of cross some boundaries and get to know people in different in different contexts within the wider church. And I found that to be a real blessing. But one of the things I've seen in all of the congregations I've served in student pastoring and since since finishing my education and becoming a solo pastor, is that it is getting harder and harder for people to be able to connect with each other. Divisions are becoming deeper and deeper. I've served congregations in different locations in Ohio and I've yet to serve a congregation or to live in a community that is all red or all blue. Every, every community I found myself in

has been in that, it's been a mix. It's been that purple blend. And many of those places, especially in the church congregations, I've seen that people have have been committed to relationship for a long time together, even in the face of their differences, but that it is getting harder and harder because we are becoming more and more polarized. And as we become more polarized, as we as we do this, it gets harder and harder, not only for individuals in individual communities to connect, but for us to get things done as a community, as a government, as a state. And, I've, I've wondered about this, about what can we do about these things, and it's so easy to give in to the despair of saying this is just how it is. This is just the world in which we live in. But there are things that we can do. And one of the factors contributing to this polarization is gerrymandered districts.

Gerrymandering, because of the way that it breaks us up, makes it, for one thing, harder and harder for a great person of any party to get elected if they are not, if they're not matched up to more extreme sides of their own party. But it also contributes to, it makes it so you have to be more extreme. But it also makes it so that moderates find their voice more and more diminished. It makes it harder for us to get things done. It makes it, also, it gives us this tendency to think about governance is all about winning for our side. And that's not the way to meet the needs of all of the people in our world and all the people in Ohio and all the people in each district. If we value democracy, that we need to value all voices and we need to focus on not having power over the other. Because when we get caught up in that and then caught up in the idea of winning and our own side getting the best district for us, then it dilutes our ability to be able to connect with one another. It makes it harder for us to work for the common good. I believe that we don't have to give in to this temptation to try to have power over one another. I believe that we have the ability to do more, to do better, that we can, we can work to have power with, to not see power as something limited we have to grasp at, but as something that we can share and utilize to help others, so that we can all live sharing the abundance that we have. We do, we have so many resources. And by having fair districts, we can make it that much easier for us to share those resources and to seek the good of all. I know that as well as those dedicated to public service, that is what you are seeking to do, to do what is good for all Ohioans. And so I urge you to resist the temptations toward toward some sneaking in some kind of gerrymandering, sneaking in some kind of way to get advantage and to seek the well-being of all, especially those whose voices are marginalized or silenced. We can do this. Thank you. [applause]

Co-Chair, Senator Vernon Sykes [01:00:05] Thank you very much, Are there any questions? Next witness is William Neff. Sarah Lown.

Lown [01:00:47] Good afternoon. Thank you for making the long trek to the corner of the state to hear our voices. My name again is Sarah Lown. I represent the Western Reserve Port Authority, which owns and operates the Youngstown Regional Airport and also serves the Youngstown Air Reserve Station. We provide economic development services for Trumbull and Mahoning counties, along with the honor of convening the mayors of the Mahoning River Corridor. We've been able to do that for about 15 years and we started doing it because we heard one thing from Columbus and DC over and over again, and that was that we are a fragmented community. We need to come together and have one voice so that you can represent us better. The mayors, after much wrangling, came together as one voice focusing on the revitalization of the Mahoning River. And we've been able to marshal the money to remove the dams and the contaminated sediments behind those dams. We anticipate significant economic impact as a result of that. Beyond the improvement of the Mahoning River, the Mahoning River, Mayor corridor Mayors Association has been able to come together on issues that they share as old industrial legacy cities. Their central business districts lie along the banks of the river, and they have

been slowly but surely revitalizing those districts and finding new economic opportunity as a result. These mayors need representation that is going to understand and advocate for their needs, as Mr. Squires put it, the indigenous political realities, I like that, so many things were good that you said but this was good, the indigenous political realities among the cities are very real and shared, and our mayors are speaking as one voice. One mayor will defer to another if an opportunity comes along that serves one city better for this year than next year and so forth. On a state level, we have been very represented by Representative Michele Lapore-Hagan because she represents all of the cities along the Mahoning River corridor. So she understands the issues we face and she's able to advocate for us consistently and with great professionalism. In Trumbull County, we are split up between two representatives, both good, but they are not able to speak as one voice, and they are fragmented in their ability to advocate for their own districts because of this lack of indigenous political realities they are challenged to face. I also want to lift up Miss Kathy Gaige for what you were saying about communities of common interest and the geographically compact nature of these districts being vital to our success. The Western Reserve Port Authority serves Trumbull County and Mahoning County, the Youngstown Warren Regional Chamber serves Mahoning County and Trumbull County, Eastgate Regional Council of Government serves Mahoning County and Trumbull County. We need representation that knows the issues faced by these economic development and infrastructure organizations and is able to articulate and advocate for them in Washington and in Columbus. It's very important to us. The communities of common interest rest along these river-sheds, these watersheds, for the Mahoning River watershed to the Grand River watershed, these are natural cultural alliances that have their history, a shared history in industrial wealth building. We would like to be able to continue to do that. The lake to river also shares a common history. It's compact. There are shared communities of interest. There are areas of economic opportunity that have never been tapped. They've never been tapped because our political representation has been fragmented and there's been no voice to help build wealth in this portion of the state. And we're behind as a result of it. The state would benefit, and the region would benefit, by having a more compact geographic region and by uplifting communities of common interest. And I want to thank you for your time. I think with a new district that I describe, we would all win. Thank you for your time. [applause]

Co-Chair, Senator Vernon Sykes [01:06:23] Are there any questions of the witness? Our next witness is Kayla Griffin.

Griffin [01:06:45] Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and members of the commission, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on behalf of my community and specifically The State of Ohio members of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, incorporated in support of fair and equitable process for drawing lines for congressional and legislative districts in the state of Ohio. I am Kayla Griffin. I am a resident of Ohio. I was born and raised in Ohio, moved to Cleveland to go to law school, started my career in Cleveland and sat on the snake on the lake. Came back to Youngstown and still are facing so many disparities when it comes to congressional districts. As you are aware, Ohio voters twice voted to amend the state constitution to adopt a more transparent and inclusive process to conduct redistricting. And while this process is compromised due to covid-19 and the late release of the 2020 census data, because of covid, the members of Delta Sigma Theta believe that Ohio has the opportunity and the ability to still develop districts that meet the demands of its voters. The goal of avoiding avoiding political gerrymandering districts is tantamount. Ohio in the past has drawn obviously gerrymandered districts that clearly had the sole intention of assuring partisan advantage of one party over another. This happened under the control of both majority political parties in the past, and it is not a practice that should

be revisited under the current circumstances. Gerrymandering allows politicians to pick voters rather than allowing voters to select their public servants. The current process for redistricting, if followed with good intentions, will allow a fair process to achieve better and truly reflective representation. This includes compactness, preserving communities of interest, boundary preservation and compliance with the Voting Rights Act. It is imperative that despite the limited time frame we are working with, the deliberate efforts must be made to successfully carry out a sound process for the submission of maps for public citizens. It is also imperative that we ensure that there is at least a minimum level of bipartisan support to adopt the maps. Failure to meet these objectives would represent a fundamental failure for the underlying interests of the voters. Finally, I would like to emphasize that the need for a majority minority district represented in the state of Ohio is imperative. As the census data indicates, our nation continues to become more diverse. Ohio is no exception, despite the loss of one congressional seat, I would hope that the solution to redrawing the district lines would not be at the expense of representations of color, People of color throughout our community. The members of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc., across the nation and here in Ohio are doing our part to represent the hundreds of thousands of alumni and collegiate chapters. We are individually and collectively engaged in educating the community about the important process. Additionally, we are here to assist citizens across the state and having their voices heard, we will be having map drawing competitions and submitting those as well. We encourage the community's participation through public testimony, submission of the maps and community education. Again, I just want to thank you for the opportunity to be heard. Thank you for your presence. And we look forward to fair maps. [applause]

Co-Chair, Senator Vernon Sykes [01:10:49] Thank you for your testimony. Next witness is Chris DeFrank.

DeFrank [01:11:11] Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your time, I appreciate it. I'll be the first to admit I'm naive when it comes to some of the nuances about gerrymandering. I know the basics. And what I do know is this. It is tantamount to election fraud, is what it is. It's fraud. The GOP sees their days numbered. I believe in the youth today. I have faith in them. I know they are going to do the right thing as they get older and become voters. I know it. Tired of poor people, People of color being disenfranchised by a system that does not speak for them. It speaks for the rich white elite. And I've had it. I'm angry everyone here should be angry. My democracy is not working for me. And when a party sees they're not going to win an election and decide to change the rules in midstream. That's not a democracy anymore. I don't know what it is, but it's not a democracy. It's not my government. I've had it. I'm tired of repeating the same thing over and over and over again. I'm tired of writing the same letters, making the same phone calls and nothing changes. The people speak, they say, we want this. Elected officials look and they go, well, we see you want this, you want that...nah, we don't think so, because that doesn't benefit us. The people want what benefits them. That's the government's job. That's it. Sorry for yelling, thank you for your time. [applause]

Co-Chair, Senator Vernon Sykes [01:13:11] Thank you for your testimony. Any questions? Representative John Patterson.

Patterson [01:13:36] Thank you, Senator. That's former State Representative Jeff Patterson. I also had put on my witness list of retired social studies teacher too I take great pride in that. And it's good to see you all again. And I want to welcome you to Northeast Ohio. But this really isn't Northeast Ohio. I live in Ashtabula County, another hour up Conneaut, you'll know where Northeast Ohio is, the outpost of this great state. But I

mention that for this reason, Ohio, you know, like you, we all travel around the state as legislators and, you know, the distances we're talking about and you know the diversity of this state. But I feel very strongly about gerrymandering for this reason, I am the Patterson of the Cupp-Patterson Fair School funding plan, [applause] OK, and all of you should take great pride in that because it was a team effort. And I, in true confession here, and I know we have a pastor, a couple of pastors here, I'm going to make a true confession. I spent more time, and Representative Ginter, you can verify this, in Representative Cupp's office when we were working on this than I did with any other legislator, save for my roommate, John Rogers, with whom I shared an apartment, simply because school funding was so complex. But we did it. The first phase is completed. There are two more cycles, shameful plug for the next two budget cycles, but we have to get the work done because it's about our kids. It's about what makes Ohio great. It's about what we love the most, and that's our children and our collective future. But I had to find a partner in this effort who was willing to work, who had the same attitude towards service, even though we differed in terms of our party affiliation. It can happen. It can work, but we have to give it a chance to work. So let me explain what this is about from a former legislator's perspective, Senator Sykes, I know you're happily married, right?

Co-Chair, Senator Vernon Sykes [01:16:06] Yes.

Patterson [01:16:07] And very happily, correct?

Co-Chair, Senator Vernon Sykes [01:16:08] My wife is here. So yes, for sure. [laughter]

Patterson [01:16:12] Yes, and I know Representative Ginter, I know you, and you would say yes? Thank you. And I won't put Senator Yuko on the spot because Pam is sitting next to him. But that would be... she left! So you can speak freely. Oh, she's here. So why do I make mention of this? Think about those of you who have been married, the give and take that takes place in that intense relationship. One partner can have blind spots when making decisions. I know I have a ton of them, and she readily, and those of you who know my wife, readily points them out and that makes for a stronger marriage. But what we have here is a marriage between all of us in this great family we call the State of Ohio, and it has to work with divergent voices. And in order to do that, we need fair districts so those voices are heard. It will make Ohio a much stronger state. And here's where the rubber meets the road. And, Auditor Faber, always good to see you, we served together on a subcommittee during finance and produced some great legislation that changed some issues that were haunting the state of Ohio, but we work together. My point to you is this, the way the districts have been drawn lend themselves to districts that either lean left, many of them lean left or lean right, and in the extreme, force potential candidates to run further left or further right. Now, I'm a former history teacher. I chaperoned a number of dances. Anybody ever do that? [laughter] Yeah. Junior high dances were simple. The boys went to one corner, the girls went to another, chaperoning was easy. That's in part, what happens when we have gerrymandered districts. What we need in the State of Ohio is a high school dance where you need a crowbar to separate them [laughter] because they're working together for a common goal, whatever that is. I leave that up to you. [laughter] My point is we all, to quote John Kennedy, Mike O'Brien, Representative O'Brien, we all breathe the same air. We all have the same goals. We all want Ohio to grow and be prosperous. We want to leave behind a legacy that is larger than what we ever can dream by ourselves. We need to work together, but we need the opportunity to do just that. And fairly drawn districts will provide that opportunity. Thank you and God bless. [applause]

Co-Chair, Senator Vernon Sykes [01:19:22] My last witness slip, Bill Adams.

Adams [01:19:35] Hi, and thanks for being here. I was going to use the same American University quote from Kennedy. No, not really. That was a really tough act to follow. But this should take 90 seconds or less. I kind of timed it out. This is from the Daily Legal News, Thursday, August 19th, last week. Census data spurred GOP's largest partisan edge in decades. It says, I'm just going to read a few paragraphs about Ohio. You know, Ohio Republicans won 12 the 16 U.S. House districts in each election since the last redistricting, taking 75 percent of the seats, even though Republican candidates never received more than 58 percent of the total two-party vote. Quote, my eyes are going bad in old age, we have some of the most rigged districts in the country. Luke Feeney, a Democrat who is mayor of the south-central Ohio city of Chillicothe, asserted during an online forum on redistricting last month. Ohio's Senate president Matt Huffman, a Republican, said new redistricting criteria limiting the splitting of counties should put an end to oddly shaped districts such as the so-called snake on the lake that stretches from Toledo to Cleveland to squeeze together a bunch of Democratic voters. However, Hoffman maintains Democrats could have had more seats under the current map if they had run better campaigns in closely contested districts. Quote, Those who want to simply say, well, it's all because of what the districts are. Well, that's simply false. Huffman said it's not just about indexes and parties, it's about candidates. Well, as another 60s icon, John Lennon once said, just give me some truth. Thank you. [applause]

Co-Chair, Senator Vernon Sykes [01:21:46] Thank you. Any questions? Seeing none, is there anyone else that would like to testify today? So looks like we have one, Janet Carson.

Carson [01:22:23] Thank you, Senator Sykes, thank you to the commission for being here. I want to speak to you today because I'm concerned for my state as a grandparent, as a mother, as a small business owner and as a voter, I am very concerned about the future of Ohio. I was born and raised in Northeast Ohio. I've lived here all my life, although I've traveled the world and seen elections in many countries. I've seen the size and prosperity of our state diminish partly because of our unfair districts. Ohio is a purple state, but we are not led that way. Our children go off to college and never return to their home state because they view Ohio as being regressive and lacking in opportunities. Parents and grandparents leave to follow their children to live in other states. This causes a problem for not only business owners, but for our tax base and for our future as a state that can be seen to be grown. We've been doing programs and incentives to try to get businesses and young people to come back to Ohio. They won't come back if they think their views don't matter. We must pay attention to what they are saying. When the people and the population diminish in the state, businesses suffer from lack of talented employees, taxes rise because of loss of revenue. And I ask you, how do we keep young people here if they feel undervalued and that their votes don't matter? Whether districts are gerrymandered to favor Democrats or Republicans, the public always loses. [applause] Please listen to the 70 percent of the voters of the state of Ohio who have voted twice to ask for fairer districts and better representation, so that votes may be heard. If you love Ohio, you'll put aside political pressures and make our districts and maps fair again. Thank you.

Co-Chair, Senator Vernon Sykes [01:25:16] Thank you for your questions at all. Well, we have exhausted all of the witness slips. I want to say that we are very impressed with the presentations that have been made today. Do we see, is there another person coming forth? Is it Nicole Lollie?

Coca [01:26:00] Sorry, terrible handwriting, Nicholas Coca

Co-Chair, Senator Vernon Sykes [01:26:02] Coca, OK,

Coca [01:26:08] Well, first of all, welcome to Mahoning Valley. For those of you that are visiting and not one of our representatives. Thank you to the commission for coming to Youngstown State and for listening to public comment. I want to give you the perspective of this community as myself a young man, twenty-six years of age, I grew up in Austintown. As you came into town this afternoon, likely from all parts of the state, you passed by, Handles ice cream, founded by Alice Handel in 1945 and before that were the home of the Good Humor Bar, founded in the 20s. Did you come through Canfield? Drive past the fairgrounds where in just a few days, will be the home of the Canfield Fair, the annual Canfield Fair, one of the largest fairs in the state. And I think most of you know that, because with respect to the commission, some of you on the board and those you represent were there recently campaigning for the very jobs that have put you in this position. Did you drive down Market Street and pass an old pizza place? Actually, a very vibrant pizza place, founded by my grandparents in 1982, Italian immigrants raising a young family, my father included. Maybe you drove down 224 and passed by the site of the very first Arby's restaurant. While Mahoning Valley is rich in history, our economic conditions today are quite poor. In June of this year, Ohio's unemployment rate was right about on pace for the national average about 5.2 percent. The Mahoning Valley, all three counties, Mahoning, Trumbull and Columbiana were all in the top 20 in the highest unemployment percentage, the lowest of which is 7.4 percent. This is nothing new. The median household income for Youngstown and Warren is about half the national and state average. In other parts like Salem, higher, but still far below. Poverty levels range from twenty one percent, up to thirty five percent. So you might be asking yourself why live here in such a gloomy situation? Many of my friends and relatives celebrate when a college graduate leaves the area for a job. We're happy for them. But for a lot of us, for myself and many others, this is no celebration. To all of us here today, this is home and we are not giving up on it. The community, you're going to find the most selfless, generous, caring people with a work ethic that only the Steel Valley can produce. Teachers who work tirelessly in struggling districts to mold a generation of young minds, including myself. The Catholic priest who taught me how to use my voice, the small business owner, who took a leap of faith and provided for community that they knew did not have a lot of disposable income. For Mahoning Valley, the good times in America, OK, the bad times are devastating. Community built on small business suffered during the covid-19 pandemic immensely. But we endured. The old saying goes, Youngstown invented grit. We don't expect good things to happen, but we make things happen. This valley deserves the undivided attention of our legislatures in both Columbus and in Washington. We deserve a voice. No longer should we be gerrymandered apart, becoming an afterthought to the politician that inherited us as constituents, just some fraction of a community they could swing by during an election year. We deserve representatives who know the Mahoning Valley as their home as their livelihood. Representatives who know their constituents because their friends, family and neighbors. We're tight knit community of people who have always looked out for one another, quite frankly, because we've gotten used to looking out for ourselves. Look around you. You'll see there's hunger for growth, opportunity and improvement. This is a community with pride and a community you see not just what is, but what could be. I've had the privilege of traveling across the United States of America. I've seen the boardwalk on the Jersey Shore and the rocky beaches of San Diego. I've had barbecue and Texas, lobster in Maine, ridden ATVs in the desert of Sedona. I've witnessed the natural beauty of the Niagara Falls, but it's amazing. It's amazing the country we have. But throughout all this, I still find myself at times missing the Sunday sauce and the kitchens of our grandmothers, [?]Trumans Mill and Mill Creek Park.

The boat rides a Mosquito Lake. Let's be honest, Chicago deep dish got nothing on Briar Hill. I've seen the White House. It's nice, but have you ever even lived if you haven't eaten a blueberry donut from White House fruit farms? Or in my case, too. OK, fine. Six. [laughter] I implore the commission to give us the representation that we deserve. We're a unique community with unique needs to represent us, you have to be one of us. When they say call your local congressman, that process had better start by dialing 3-3-0 and [applause] in this community, we look out for each other because we have to look out for ourselves. It's about time we have the undivided attention of our representatives in Columbus and in Washington. Thank you to the commissioner and God bless Mahoning Valley.

Co-Chair, Senator Vernon Sykes [01:32:14] Questions? Seeing none, thank you very much, Reverend Kenneth Simon.

Simon [01:32:33] Chairman Sykes, and to the legislators and to this wonderful audience, my apologies, I did not intend to speak today, but I was moved by the young man who spoke so passionately. Um, I'm chairman of the Community Mobilization Coalition for the Greater Youngstown Area, a group of 18 minority organizations organized for the express purpose of voter registration, voter education and voter mobilization. We've been in existence for twenty-two years and affecting the political, hopefully, climate here in the city of Youngstown. I've been through this process before, along with many of us in this room, where we appear before our legislators. I've been down to Columbus appearing before a Senate education committee and giving testimony, and others have traveled distances to go down and testify. They're concerned people in this room who've taken time out of their schedules to come here and give their passionate testimony. And the passion that the young man displayed hits at the heart of all of our pain is that the sad reality is that we're going to have these sessions and we're going to listen to all of this testimony. And we're going to go behind closed doors and do what we've been doing, voting along party lines. And that's the sad reality and that's the pain that that young man was trying to convey. We spend all of this time in a formality and then we go back behind closed doors and we, we're not going to do the right thing, we're going to do what we've been doing, voting along party lines because, and it's not because we don't care, it's because we care about the wrong thing. [applause] We don't care about the people. I hope that you all would prove us prove me wrong. I hope that you would prove me wrong. But the sad reality is that's how it has been. I have been through hearings and hearings and testifying, and we just keep doing the same thing because we don't hear the people. We're loyal to our parties. And that has got to stop in The State of Ohio. Please prove me wrong. Thank you. [applause]

Co Chair, Senator Vernon Sykes [01:35:51] Irene McCollum.

McCollum [01:35:53] Yes, I'm Irene McCollum, and he felt passionate after hearing the person before him and now I feel passionate after hearing him. So I came today with an article that I found online from Forbes magazine, and it's dated November 10th, 2020, and it was written by Kevin Anderton. And the title is Middle School Students, students solve the issue of gerrymandering and win a ten-thousand-dollar prize. And three New York middle school students around the age of 15 put together a science research project and took on the serious issue of gerrymandering that is involves the political party in power being allowed to alter voting district boundaries to help retain their position, and that it's an ongoing problem in the United States. So they put together a mathematical algorithm that could draw a fair and balanced district boundaries, and they won this award based on their scientific research that was submitted. And I think it's something that we should look into, basically. Could it be something so simple that these young students, these smart young

students came up with a formula, a mathematical formula that will truly take away gerrymandering and come up with districts that have no personal involvement with them and are based on what's best, the best district lines that could come. And they used Alabama as an example in their article. So that's just what I wanted to share, in case, you know, and in case it really could be something that's solved so simply, thank you for listening and thank you. [applause]

Co-Chair, Senator Vernon Sykes [01:38:03] Thank you. And make sure we get a copy of that for our records, please. This is the final call, any additional?.. Well, I'd like again to thank you all for your participation, the presentations were passionate and informative. We are on a spin around the state. We're at Cleveland State this morning. We're going to be at Sinclair College and University of Cincinnati tomorrow. Every day we're covering two cities. We really appreciate the input. We are pledged. In fact, we've taken an oath, the members of the commission, to draft districts that comply with our new constitutional provisions. So we're getting the information from you so that we can improve fair districts in the State of Ohio. With that, I like to call this meeting adjourned.