

**Draft Resolution**  
**Support the Restoration of Fair Districts in Ohio**

**Whereas** the Episcopal Church has long championed civil rights, and opposes gerrymandering, writing in Resolution 2018-D003, "That in accordance with Executive Council Resolution AN033 adopted October 25, 2017, the 79th General Convention of The Episcopal Church reaffirms that one person one vote means that the votes of all citizens of all races and ethnicities are fairly represented, counted and accounted for; that we oppose any form of partisan gerrymandering which has the same effect of racial gerrymandering;" and

**Whereas** Ohio is now conducting elections using state and Congressional district maps ruled unconstitutional by the Ohio Supreme Court for excessive partisan gerrymandering, and

**Whereas** all members of the 2021-22 Redistricting Commission were elected officials who defied seven Supreme Court rulings ordering them to correct the imbalance, and

**Whereas** a broad non-partisan coalition of citizens including the League of Women Voters, Common Cause Ohio, the Ohio Council of Churches, and A. Philip Randolph League, is now collecting petition signatures to qualify a proposed constitutional amendment called Citizens Not Politicians for the November ballot, and

**Whereas** Citizens Not Politicians, if approved by voters, will prohibit elected officials, party officials, and lobbyists from serving on the Redistricting Commission, and create a redistricting process with safeguards for fairness and transparency in drawing maps, and

**Whereas** the Diocese of Southern Ohio has made Becoming Beloved Community - which includes protecting civil rights, fair elections, and racial equity - the heart of our mission,

**Be it resolved that** the Diocese of Southern Ohio endorses the Citizens Not Politicians initiative to create a fair, unbiased, and transparent process for creating Ohio's electoral maps.

**Explanation:** This citizen-sponsored reform provides a tremendous opportunity to create fair, representative electoral districts in time for the 2026 election. It is our most direct and effective way to promote the protections for social justice which are essential to Becoming Beloved Community. Our Diocese's public support for the nonpartisan Citizens Not Politicians constitutional amendment would show Ohio citizens what our faith community stands for in our Baptismal vows: seeking and serving Christ in all persons, striving for justice and peace among all people, and respecting the dignity of every human being.

### **Citizens Not Politicians reforms:**

- Create a 15-member Ohio Citizens Redistricting Commission representing both parties and independents who broadly represent the different geographic areas and demographics of Ohio.
- Ban current or former politicians, political party officials, and lobbyists from the Commission.
- Prohibit districts that discriminate against or favor any political party or individual politician.
- Require the commission to operate under an open and independent process.

Concerned citizens across Ohio are fired up by a series of terrible policy setbacks that undermine public safety, honesty in education, voter access, and environmental justice. The Citizens Not Politicians constitutional amendment campaign has tremendous momentum thanks to voters' victory in August 2022 in defeating the Legislature's attempt to make it significantly harder for voters to amend Ohio's constitution.

Voters of both parties as well as independents bring to this campaign their grief and frustration at the cynical way redistricting was conducted in 2021-22, ignoring the work of thousands of people in turning out for hearings or submitting testimony - including maps that met all of Ohio's constitutional criteria - only to see this work come to naught as the Redistricting Commission created maps that preserve the existing supermajorities in both our state legislature and our Congressional delegation. Allowing elected officials to serve on the Commission brings a built-in conflict of interest that can corrupt the process, no matter which party is in the majority.

Ohio's Congressional and state district maps from 2011-2020 created enough "safe" or uncompetitive districts to produce a veto-proof supermajority in both houses of the Ohio Legislature, and the current maps preserve it. This enables the majority party to enact policies that often go against the views of the majority of Ohio voters as documented in the annual [Ohio Pulse Poll](#) conducted by Baldwin Wallace University. Many of these policies undermine the Becoming Beloved Community mission of our church.

The Legislature can do this because it is safe from accountability to the concerns of the majority of voters, and can instead prioritize actions that favor major donors such as utilities (see HB 6, the core of Ohio's \$61 million dollar corruption case) and fossil fuel interests, or appeal to the ideological base who turn out in primaries, like voters who see any regulation of gun ownership as an attack on their constitutional rights.

To illustrate the impact of this injustice on policies long championed by the Episcopal Church, here are just a few examples of laws that have been passed or are close to passing despite the overwhelming preponderance of citizen testimony opposing them:

- Stripping the state school board of its authority over curriculum after members passed a resolution in 2020 calling for action to overcome racial bias which had been amply documented in its study of over 600 public school districts.
- New restrictions on voter access including shortening early voting, new ID requirements, and limiting drop boxes to one location per county.
- SB 83 - one vote away from passage - which will block diversity, equity, and inclusion programs at public universities and chill honest teaching about "divisive content" such as civil rights and climate change.
- Stand Your Ground legislation despite opposition from major city police chiefs.
- Permitless conceal-carry of guns
- Prohibiting local governments such as Cincinnati and Columbus from passing gun safety ordinances such as safe storage requirements to reduce children's risk of suicide or accidental death.
- HB 6 killing Ohio's renewable energy standards and energy efficiency programs, and imposing charges on all Ohio ratepayers to subsidize two obsolete, inefficient coal-fired plants

Ohio voters brought suit against the 2011 Ohio redistricting plan, but were defeated by the 2019 US Supreme Court ruling in [Rucho v Common Cause](#), that declined to define and set limits on illegal partisan gerrymandering and referred the issue to Congress and state legislators.

Meanwhile, Ohio voters had passed two constitutional amendments by votes of over 70% to try to prevent partisan gerrymandering by defining it. Developed as a compromise between legislative leaders and nonpartisan groups including the League of Women Voters, this created a seven-member Redistricting Commission including three top statewide elected officials and two from each party and house of the Legislature. These amendments set a number of criteria for fair districts, including keeping communities of interest intact.

This process was completely subverted by the legislative leaders of the Ohio Senate and House in a Groundhog-Day like drama which unfolded from delays in starting redistricting and scheduling public hearings, through the drafting of seven different plans in 2021-22, every one of which was found by a majority of the Ohio Supreme Court to violate the rules enacted by voters in the 2015 and 2018 constitutional amendments. The recently-retired Chief Justice of the Ohio Supreme Court, Republican Maureen O'Connor, wrote or concurred in all seven rulings and has played a central role in drafting Citizens Not Politicians to remove conflict of interest from the process.

A federal court panel finally ruled that Ohio needed to use one of the unconstitutional sets of state and Congressional maps in order to carry out the 2022 election, and those are the maps we will use in 2024. These maps have preserved the supermajority that enables the General Assembly to override the Governor's veto, as they did in the recent struggle over health care for transgender youth.

If Citizens Not Politicians makes it onto the ballot and passes, Ohio will use the new process to redraw state and Congressional districts in 2025. This would give us new maps for the 2026 election.

**Impact:** Gerrymandering has crippled the US House of Representatives by producing legislators who are chosen by the minority of voters who turn out for primaries - voters who tend to be more ideological. Fear of being "primaried" is a form of intimidation impeding legislators from working across the aisle and seeking compromises that balance the concerns of our diverse public. Fair districts will be more competitive and create incentives for elected officials to listen to the range of views of those they represent.

For our Diocese, championing fair electoral districts will be a powerful way to walk our talk of Becoming Beloved Community. Many voters have not yet heard of Citizens Not Politicians (I know this because of my conversations with people while asking them to consider signing the petition.). There will be a flood of attack ads and misinformation about this proposal in the months leading up to the election.

Episcopalians who talk about the underlying need and opportunity with our neighbors will provide a bracing and heartening example of honesty, neighbor-love, and commitment to protect our democratic institutions in the quest for the common good, or, as we proclaim, to become beloved community.

Endorsing this constitutional amendment does not create any new financial cost for the Diocese.

***Submitted by***

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