



The OEA will lead the way for continuous improvement of public education while advocating for members and the learners they serve.

**Ohio Redistricting Commission
Wednesday, August 25, 2021- Zanesville
Testimony: OEA Vice President Jeff Wensing**

Co-Chairs Cupp and Sykes, Members of the Ohio Redistricting Commission:

My name is Jeff Wensing. I'm a high school math teacher from Parma and it's also my privilege to serve as the Vice President of the Ohio Education Association. On behalf of our 120,000 members, thank you for the opportunity to testify about the important task of creating new legislative districts for the General Assembly.

There is a well-known saying that all politics is local. I've experienced this from dealing with issues as a teacher and union leader in my local school district. We would try to address problems through organizing, work on behalf of endorsed candidates for school board, and work with the community to pass levies. Were we always successful? No. But there was a sense of community and common interest. Even when we lost, we felt our voice had been heard.

For the past few years, I've served as Vice President of OEA. As I talk to members around the state, they don't always feel heard or respected by their legislators. Admittedly, comparing a single school district to a House or Senate district is not an apples-to-apples comparison. The size of the districts dictates that they include several districts and can span several counties. However, we often see that communities are needlessly split among several different legislative districts. Or areas may be carved out of one district to be a sliver in another. When this happens the voice of the community and its citizens is diluted.

I've spoken with members who feel like their communities are an afterthought or an inconvenience when talking to their legislator. I've also spoken to those who never receive any response at all. Obviously, there are great legislators on both sides of the aisle. Those who will listen to and respect the concerns of their constituents even when they disagree. However, officials can be less than responsive if they're in a district drawn expressly so they don't have to worry about a competitive election.

Citizens feel frustrated about a government that is less responsive to their needs than it should be. That was a driving force behind the push for and passage of redistricting reform. Manipulating districts through partisan gerrymandering is fundamentally undemocratic. The voters have demanded that our leaders do better. And it starts with you and the work of this Commission.

I urge you to live up to the spirit of redistricting reform as passed by the voters of Ohio. Districts should be drawn that keep communities of interest together. They should be compact and make sense—they should pass the "eye test." Most importantly, partisan advantage should be put aside. This Commission needs to work together in a bipartisan fashion to deliver fair districts. That's what we voted for and have every right to expect from our leaders.



Thank you for your time and your service to Ohio's citizens. I'm happy to answer questions you may have.