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“Citizens Not Politicians” – An Ohio Citizens Redistricting Commission

The League of Women Voters has been working on redistricting in Ohio for decades. Most recently we were part of a Fair Districts coalition that passed state constitutional amendments in 2015 and 2018 to reform the redistricting process and control gerrymandering. However, even with the reforms, the redistricting process after the 2020 Census was dragged out for years, with maps being ruled unconstitutional by the Ohio Supreme Court a whopping SEVEN times (five times for state legislative maps and twice for congressional ones). This ended up costing Ohio taxpayers tens of millions of dollars, but still didn't result in fair, impartial districts. In fact, the maps used for the most recent general election had been declared unconstitutional but were used anyway. Ohio is one of the most gerrymandered states in the country.

So in 2024, we are trying again. **Citizens Not Politicians** is a citizen-led initiative to end gerrymandering. It bans lobbyists and politicians from the redistricting process and instead establishes the Ohio Citizens Redistricting Commission, empowering citizens to draw fair districts using an open and transparent process. League of Women Voters members across Ohio currently are collecting petition signatures to get the state constitutional amendment on the November ballot. These Study Pages describe the proposed Amendment.

Link to the full [Citizens Not Politicians amendment](#)

The Citizens Not Politicians proposal will amend the Ohio Constitution to:

- Create the 15-member Ohio Citizens Redistricting Commission, made up of five Democratic, five Republican, and five Independent citizens who broadly represent the different geographic areas and demographics of the state.
- Ban current or former politicians, political party officials, and lobbyists from sitting on the Commission.
- Require fair and impartial districts by making it unconstitutional to draw voting districts that discriminate against or favor any political party or individual politician.
- Require the commission to operate under an open and independent process.



Seven states now have independent citizen commissions: Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Michigan, Montana, and Washington. Those that have done best in producing fair maps have a very clear set of redistricting criteria, explicit transparency requirements, and a review at the end by a third party such as the state Supreme Court. The amendment proposed by Citizens Not Politicians includes all of these criteria.

The Commission

The Ohio Citizens Redistricting Commission will be responsible for adopting redistricting plans for the Ohio General Assembly and new districts for the United States House of Representatives. The Commission will consist of fifteen members who are all ordinary citizens — not elected office holders, not party office holders, not lobbyists, nor their family members. The number of commissioners is designed to ensure geographical and demographic diversity in the Commission.

The Commission will be made up of:

- Five members affiliated with the First Major Party (currently Republican);
- Five members affiliated with the Second Major Party (currently Democrat); and
- Five members who are Independent (or unaffiliated with either of the two major parties)

To be eligible to serve, a commissioner must be a resident of Ohio who has continuously resided in the state during the current year and immediately preceding six years and is registered to vote. An **applicant is ineligible** if, in the current or prior six years, they or their immediate family members were: elected or appointed to serve in public office; campaigned for public office; registered as a lobbyist; served as an officer, paid consultant or contractor of a campaign committee, political action committee or political party; or, served as a staff member, paid consultant or contractor for an elected official or candidate for public office. After serving as a commissioner, the citizen will be ineligible to hold elective or appointive state office in Ohio for six years.

Party affiliation is determined based on the applicant’s voting record in party primaries and other relevant factors including, but not limited to, political contributions, campaign activities, or other reliable indications of partisan affiliation. **Independents** could be anyone who doesn’t vote in partisan primaries or consider themselves to be members of either of the two major political parties. They could be a member of a third party or unaffiliated altogether. The vast majority of Ohioans could be considered to be “independents” since most Ohioans do not vote in primaries.

There will be an open **application process** for appointment to the Commission. A bipartisan screening panel of retired judges will review applications and create a qualified pool of 90 applicants. The 90 applicants will have publicly broadcast interviews and the public has an opportunity to comment on the applicants. Then the screening panel narrows the pool from 90 to 45 applicants who represent a geographic and demographic cross-section of Ohio. The Panel randomly draw six names from the 45 finalists during a public meeting:

- two affiliated with the First Major Party
- two affiliated with the Second Major Party
- two Independents or unaffiliated

At the next public meeting, the six members chosen by lottery will choose nine additional people from the applicants to complete the Commission. These nine will be composed of an equal number of members affiliated with the First Major Party, the Second Major Party and Independents.

Procedures

For meetings and for **decision-making**, nine Commissioners must be present to constitute a quorum. All acts of the Commission must be in public meetings. All decisions require an affirmative vote of

at least nine of the 15 members, including: two affiliated with the First Major Party, two affiliated with the Second Major Party, two Independents or unaffiliated with either major political party.

There are **deadlines** to produce and adopt a proposed redistricting plan. The amendment requires that the Commission adopt 2026 maps no later than September 19, 2025. Maps must be created no later than July 15 of each year following the decennial census thereafter. Unlike the current process, there is no option to stonewall the process. If there is no agreement, then there is a ranked choice voting process for selecting a map.

Mapping Criteria

Each proposed map must contain single-member districts that are geographically contiguous (meaning unbroken) and comply with the United States Constitution and federal laws, including the Voting Rights Act of 1965 which prohibits racial gerrymandering.

Following that, in order of priority, districts must:

- be reasonably equal population based on the most recent federal decennial census,
- ensure opportunities for racial, ethnic, and language minorities to elect candidates of their choice, and
- preserve “communities of interest” to the extent practicable.

“Communities of interest” are defined as an area with recognized communities of people with broadly shared interests and representational needs, including those that arise from common ethnic, racial, social, cultural, geographic, environmental, socioeconomic, or historic identities or concerns. Counties, municipal corporations, townships, and school districts may constitute a community of interest, but communities of interest are based on testimony.

The amendment requires the districts to “closely correspond” to the statewide partisan preferences, ensuring the maps don’t unduly favor one political party over others. The Commission also is prohibited from considering the place of residence of an incumbent elected official or candidate.

The Amendment provides for review of a plan by the Ohio Supreme Court using Special Masters who are qualified demographers. After review by the Court, the Special Masters have the power to make adjustments to a plan to bring it into compliance with the Ohio Constitution. The Amendment has a funding requirement which will allow for map making training and the use of experts to assist the commissioners.

Passing the Amendment

The Citizens Not Politicians campaign is actively collecting signatures throughout Ohio to get the Amendment on the November 2024 ballot. They must collect over 400,000 valid signatures from registered voters by the end of June.

Once we are successful in getting the Amendment on the ballot, we must actively educate voters and work for its passage in November. It’s time to end gerrymandering in Ohio, once and for all!

Discussion Questions

1. Is anyone in the group collecting signatures for the Citizens Not Politicians amendment? Ask them to share their experience.
2. What is gerrymandering and why is it unfair to voters?
3. The League has worked on reforming the redistricting process in Ohio for decades. How important is ending gerrymandering? Why is it so hard?
4. Are ordinary citizens really qualified to draw maps? What support would the citizen commissioners need?
5. What is your understanding of “communities of interest” as described in the Amendment? Can you give an example that is not a government jurisdiction like a city or township?
6. What ideas can you share on collecting petition signatures? When the Amendment is on the ballot, what can we do to ensure its passage?
7. Who benefits from fair district maps and how?