

## **Constitutional Initiative to Reform Redistricting in Ohio: Voters First Proposal Summary**

### **Executive Summary**

A politically independent citizens commission would draw both state legislative and Congressional districts. Under present law, state legislative districts are drawn by a partisan board, and Congressional districts are drawn by the state legislature. This has led to unfair plans being drawn behind closed doors, to the disadvantage of the people of Ohio. The proposed initiative would take redistricting out of the hands of incumbent politicians, and would place it in the hands of an impartial citizens commission. The Ohio Citizens Independent Redistricting Commission -- composed of equal numbers of Republicans, Democrats and independents, and reflecting the diversity of Ohio -- would be required to draw fair districts, which do not favor or disfavor a particular party, incumbent or candidate. District boundaries would be drawn to promote fairness, competitiveness, compactness, and preservation of existing communities. Paid lobbyists, incumbents, and others with a personal or financial interest in elections would be barred from serving on the citizens commission.

### **Highlights**

- ***Citizens, Not Politicians.*** Instead of the current procedures (in which politicians draw district boundaries that unfairly favor their own party and/or protect incumbents), a 12-member citizens commission will create the districts. Any member of the public can submit a plan for consideration.
- ***Openness and Transparency.*** All meetings, records, communications and draft plans of the commission must be open to the public. No more backroom deals.
- ***Balance and Impartiality.*** The citizens commission will include equal numbers of Republicans, Democrats and independents, and the approval of at least seven of the twelve members of the commission will be required for the adoption of any plan. This will ensure that the final plan fairly represents all Ohioans, not just those currently in power.
- ***Community Representation.*** Districts will be created that are geographically compact, and which minimize the division of counties, townships, municipalities and wards between different districts.
- ***Competitive Districts.*** Politically balanced districts will be created, rather than “safe districts” which make it difficult or impossible for voters to hold elected officials accountable.
- ***Fairness.*** To the greatest extent possible, the share of districts leaning toward a party will reflect the political preferences of the voters of Ohio.

## **Specific Procedures and Criteria**

The first 9 members of the 12-person Commission will be chosen by lot from pools of independent, Democratic and Republican citizens who will have been screened by a panel of eight appellate court judges to assure that the Commission includes individuals with the skills, abilities and capacity for impartiality that will allow the Commission to fulfill its responsibilities. These 9 members (3 Republicans, 3 Democrats and 3 independents) will then select the remaining three (1 Democrat, 1 Republican and 1 independent) in such a manner as to ensure that the Commission's composition reflects the diversity of Ohio. All meetings, records, communications and draft plans of the Commission shall be open to the public. The affirmative vote of at least 7 members of the Commission shall be required to adopt any plan.

Redistricting plans and maps may be proposed by any member of the public or by the Commission itself. To be considered, a plan must comply with all applicable Ohio and federal constitutional and statutory provisions, including, but not limited to, those dealing specifically with the protection of minority voting rights. No plan shall be adopted with intent to favor or disfavor a political party, incumbent or potential candidate. The Commission shall adopt the redistricting plan that, in its judgment, most closely meets the following four criteria:

- (1) **Community Preservation:** Minimizes the number of governmental units (counties, contiguous townships, municipalities and city wards) that are divided between different districts;
- (2) **Competitive Districts:** Maximizes the number of politically balanced districts (i.e., that do not favor one party by more than five percent, based upon political party indexes calculated on the basis of recent representative statewide elections);
- (3) **Representational fairness:** Balances the number of districts leaning toward each party so that the number of districts leaning toward each party closely corresponds to the preferences of the voters of Ohio, as determined using actual election results from recent representative statewide elections;
- (4) **Compactness:** Creates districts that are compact.

If the Supreme Court of Ohio or a federal court determines the plan to be invalid, the Ohio Citizens Independent Redistricting Commission shall establish new boundaries. If it becomes necessary for any court to establish any district boundaries, it shall select from among the plans submitted to or considered by the Commission, and it shall adopt the plan that most closely meets the four criteria listed above.

### **Eligibility**

Any Ohio elector is eligible to serve on the Commission, except for those who have failed to vote in at least two of the past three general elections or, in the past ten years, have served as a federal or state elected official; have been a paid employee of the legislature, Congress or of a state or federal elected official; have served as director of a state department or agency; or have been a paid lobbyist. Also ineligible are those who in the past five years have run for state or federal elective office; have been an employee or paid consultant for a political campaign; have been an official or paid employee of any political party; or contributed more than \$5,000 to political campaigns or political parties during the last two years.