

# The Columbus Dispatch

## POLITICS

# Gov. DeWine wants to remove politicians from redistricting but hasn't endorsed new proposal



**Jessie Balmert**

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Gov. Mike DeWine says Ohio politicians shouldn't draw maps for congressional and statehouse districts – but that doesn't mean he's endorsing a new constitutional amendment that could be on the ballot in 2024.

DeWine was part of the seven-member Ohio Redistricting Commission, which drew maps that the Ohio Supreme Court repeatedly ruled violated anti-gerrymandering rules in the state constitution. DeWine voted for the maps despite acknowledging the process was flawed and gridlocked.

In the months since, DeWine has said it's time to remove politicians like himself from redistricting, the method of crafting new districts for members of the Ohio Statehouse and Congress every 10 years based on new population data.

"Look, I don't think the governor should be on there," DeWine, a Republican, told reporters last week. "I don't think the legislators should be on there either."

"The system we have today doesn't work for Ohio," DeWine said Monday after announcing Alisha Nelson would lead the OneOhio Recovery Foundation, tasked with distributing opioid settlement money. "I'm in favor of making a change (on redistricting). Whether this is the right change or not, I don't know, because I haven't really gone through and studied it."

But DeWine's spokesman Dan Tierney has reviewed it. He outlined several potential problems with the constitutional amendment, saying that the proposal would prioritize Ohio's statewide voting preferences over keeping cities and communities together.

"Traditionally, we've called that gerrymandering," Tierney said.

If the proposed amendment passed, DeWine's 25-point victory over Democrat Nan Whaley in 2022 wouldn't count toward the state's partisan preferences for 2031 mapmaking. That's because the proposal has a six-year lookback rather than the current 10. Tierney said that looks like "political gamesmanship."

Will those proposals be dealbreakers for DeWine? Ultimately, the governor's goal is to ensure "the cure isn't worse than the sickness," Tierney said.

Citizens Not Politicians spokesperson Chris Davey said they agreed with DeWine's position that the current system is broken. "Our proposal would end gerrymandering by empowering citizens, not politicians, to draw fair districts using an open and transparent process."

The proposed constitutional amendment is in the early stage of attempting to make the November 2024 ballot. It first must clear several technical hurdles before backers collect more than 413,000 signatures.

But first, DeWine and the Ohio Redistricting Commission must draw state House and Senate maps for the 2024 election. The congressional map is awaiting an Ohio Supreme Court review as well. Candidates must file to run for those seats in December for the March primary so the clock is ticking.

"It's going to happen one of these days," DeWine said.

*Jessie Balmert is a reporter for the USA TODAY Network Ohio Bureau, which serves the Columbus Dispatch, Cincinnati Enquirer, Akron Beacon Journal and 18 other affiliated news organizations across Ohio.*

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