

# When will they approve maps? Ohio Redistricting Commission to meet Wednesday.

**Jessie Balmert**  
Cincinnati Enquirer

A week after its first meeting stalled over picking a co-chair, the GOP-dominated Ohio Redistricting Commission will meet again Wednesday.

The seven-member panel of three statewide elected officials and four lawmakers is tasked with drawing new House and Senate districts because the Ohio Supreme Court ruled that the ones used in the 2022 elections were unconstitutional. In 2015, voters overwhelmingly approved changes aimed at improving the mapmaking process but it has been mired in dysfunction.

It was not clear on Tuesday if top Republicans in the Ohio Legislature had agreed on a path forward, either on maps for the two legislative chambers or on a co-chair to help lead the commission. House Speaker Jason Stephens and Senate President Matt Huffman, both Republicans, could face off in a fight for the Ohio House's top role as soon as 2025, which has complicated negotiations.

"I'm optimistic that we'll be able to move forward tomorrow," Gov. Mike DeWine said at a Tuesday news conference about gun violence in Columbus.

"There's almost a map, at least to start with. We're not quite there yet. The House and Senate have been going back and forth, but they're close."

The Legislature's top Democrats said Tuesday morning that they hadn't seen full maps from their Republican counterparts and wouldn't vote for a plan that gives the GOP more of an advantage.

"If we see a map proposed that shows an unwillingness to do that (give up GOP seats), it will be very clear that this is not a serious attempt at trying to draw a constitutional map and it's just more of the same," said House Minority Leader Allison Russo, D-Upper Arlington.

The meeting is set for 3 p.m. Wednesday at the Rhodes State Office Tower.

## **Democrats pitch their proposal**

On Tuesday, Russo and Senate Minority Leader Nickie Antonio released legislative maps that would give Republicans a 19-14 advantage in the Senate and a 56-43 advantage in the House.

"Our map more closely matches Ohio's statewide voter preferences than the current map that we're functioning under," said Antonio, D-Lakewood.

For example, the Democrats' Senate map would create two Democratic districts and one Republican one within Cincinnati's Hamilton County instead of the current map, which has two GOP districts and one Democratic one. One of the current districts stretches into Warren County, which has more GOP voters.

Under the Democrats' proposal, the district currently represented by Republican Sen. Stephanie Kunze, of Hilliard, would stretch from Dublin, Hilliard and Worthington in Franklin County into Union County instead of the current configuration, which includes Madison and Pickaway counties. The change makes that district more Democratic.

Senate GOP spokesman John Fortney said past Democratic maps have had "significant constitutional violations." He added that good faith negotiations continue on maps.

## **Attorney General: Co-chairs not needed to get moving**

Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost told the Ohio Redistricting Commission in an unprompted letter that it doesn't need co-chairs to continue meeting. DeWine postponed the meeting last week after top GOP lawmakers couldn't agree on a person to co-lead the commission.

"The delay in choosing a co-chair need not hamper the process and the commission is on solid legal footing to convene a meeting and continue the important work ahead," wrote Yost, a Republican.

The issue could be moot if top legislative Republicans agree on a person to help lead the commission. Democrats said they weren't sure why Yost wrote the advisory letter.

"I'm not quite sure why the attorney general weighed in. It's nice that he has an opinion," Antonio said.

*Reporter Bethany Bruner contributed to this article.*