

Ohio redistricting measure to replace politicians with citizen panel clears 1st hurdle

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A group that wants to remove lawmakers from the process of drawing congressional and state legislative maps cleared its first hurdle Monday.

The group, Citizens Not Politicians, has proposed replacing the current Ohio Redistricting Commission, composed of three statewide elected officials and four lawmakers, with a 15-member citizen panel instead. Ohioans would have to approve that change to the state constitution, and the group is targeting the November 2024 ballot.

Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost, a Republican, certified the group's language as a "fair and truthful" summary of the constitutional amendment Monday after rejecting two prior versions.

The approval comes shortly after Republicans and Democrats agreed on new state House and Senate districts for the 2024 elections. The new maps would give Republicans an advantage in about 62% of House seats and nearly 70% of Senate seats. Democrats signed off on the deal while pleading for a better process.

"The future of redistricting in Ohio not only deserves to be in the hands of citizens, not politicians, but it must be done in an objective independent process," Senate Minority Leader Nickie Antonio, D-Lakewood, said in statement after the vote. "I believe this is our best path forward."

But Senate President Matt Huffman, R-Lima, said the redistricting process, messy as it was, worked. "The process is ugly. People are upset, but it's the process that we voted on and that's how you get bipartisan buy-in," he said.

Ohio will use the same congressional map in 2024 as it did in 2022.

What's next?

After clearing Yost's review, the proposed redistricting amendment heads to the Ohio Ballot Board. The five-person panel led by Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose will determine if the proposed amendment should be one or

more issues on the ballot. Dividing the measure into multiple proposals would increase the number of signatures proponents would need to collect.

Once redistricting reform advocates clear the ballot board, they must collect at least 413,487 valid signatures from 44 counties to make the ballot.

"We are excited to take the next steps toward gathering signatures on petitions so we can put the Citizens Not Politicians Amendment to Ohio voters in November 2024," campaign spokesman Chris Davey said.