

Ohio redistricting: Signature collection begins for plan to ax politicians from mapmaking

Jessie Balmert

Cincinnati Enquirer

Five years after Ohioans overwhelmingly voted to fix the redistricting process, a new group says the actual solution is replacing politicians with average citizens. On Thursday, it got the green light to collect signatures for the 2024 ballot.

Citizens Not Politicians, spearheaded by former Ohio Supreme Court Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor, wants to remove politicians from the process of drawing new statehouse and congressional maps and replace them with a 15-member citizen commission.

The group argues that the current Ohio Redistricting Commission has gerrymandered districts and failed voters – even though Republicans and Democrats recently approved new statehouse districts.

On Thursday, the Ohio Ballot Board led by Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose unanimously approved the proposed constitutional amendment as one issue instead of dividing it into multiple measures.

"For Ohioans of all political persuasions, this is a big day because the citizens are one step closer to taking the driver's wheel and putting the politicians in the back seat," O'Connor said in a statement. "This amendment will end gerrymandering in Ohio by putting citizens – not politicians – in charge of drawing legislative districts."

Now, redistricting reform advocates can collect the 413,487 signatures from at least 44 counties to make the November 2024 ballot. They have until July 3, 2024, to hit that number.

Under the new proposal, a bipartisan panel of former judges would help pick the 15-member commission, which could not include elected officials, lobbyists and campaign staff. The goal: Assemble a group that's less beholden to partisan politics.

The current commission of five GOP elected officials and two Democratic ones recently approved House and Senate maps through the 2030 elections. That plan would give Republicans the advantage in as many as 69% of seats, according to a legal challenge filed over the maps.

The Ohio Supreme Court is reviewing whether these maps violate voter-approved rules to curb gerrymandering. But the new Chief Justice Sharon Kennedy, a Republican, would have approved several prior plans that the court rejected as unconstitutional in 2022.

"There's no perfect process," said LaRose, who sits on the Ohio Redistricting Commission. "There's no algorithm that will do this work for us. It's a human process. There will always be some level of politics involved in redistricting."

Reporter Haley BeMiller contributed to this article.