

# Ohio Supreme Court upholds new state legislative redistricting plan

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COLUMBUS, Ohio — The Ohio Supreme Court on Monday upheld the state's new legislative redistricting plan, dismissing lawsuits filed by Democratic and good-government groups claiming the new maps are illegally gerrymandered.

The ruling means that new Ohio House and Senate maps, passed with bipartisan support by the Ohio Redistricting Commission in September, will remain in place through 2030, unless Ohio voters approve a proposed overhaul to the redistricting process itself next year. Those GOP-authored maps give Republicans an advantage on paper in [61 of 99 Ohio House districts](#) and [23 of 33 state Senate districts](#), according to State Auditor Keith Faber, the commission's Republican co-chair.

In a [4-3, party-line ruling](#), the court's Republican justices dismissed the lawsuits on procedural grounds. The GOP majority wrote in an unsigned opinion that while the case began in 2021 to challenge previously passed maps that only had Republican support, the two Democrats on the Ohio Redistricting Commission joined the panel's five Republicans in passing new Ohio Senate and House district lines in September.

"Now that the commission has adopted a plan with bipartisan support, the facts currently before us bear no resemblance to the allegations in petitioners' complaints," the majority wrote in an unsigned decision. "We therefore dismiss these cases, rendering moot respondents' motions to vacate. We express no view on the merits of petitioners' proposed objections to the September 2023 plan or on respondents' arguments in opposition to those objections."

Democratic Justice Jennifer Brunner, in a written dissent, stated that it's "illusory to suggest" that a bipartisan redistricting vote "somehow diminishes our review power or renders a unanimous redistricting plan constitutionally compliant."

The composition of the court itself has changed since the case first began. In 2021 and 2022, the Ohio Supreme Court threw out five legislative redistricting plans passed by Republicans on the redistricting commission on the grounds that they unfairly helped

Republicans. However, the crucial swing vote in those cases, Republican then-Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor, retired at the end of last year, and Republican Joe Deters – who voted to dismiss the redistricting lawsuits -- since joined the court.

The three lawsuits challenging the new state legislative maps were filed by former [Democratic legislative candidate Bria Bennett](#) of Warren (with the support by a national Democratic redistricting group), the Ohio Organizing Collaborative, and the League of Women Voters of Ohio.

The new maps are more favorable to Republicans than the maps that were used in last year's legislative elections, which gave the Republicans an on-paper edge in 56 House seats and 18 Senate seats. Even though that set of maps was one of the plans found unconstitutional by the O'Connor-led court, they ultimately [were ordered by a federal court to be used anyway](#), leading to Republicans winning 67 House seats and 26 Senate seats last November -- the largest majorities that either party has held since the Ohio legislature went to one-member districts in the 1960s.

The two Democrats on the redistricting commission, Senate Minority Leader Nickie Antonio of Lakewood and House Minority Leader Allison Russo of suburban Columbus, said they voted for the new maps because [\(among other things\)](#) they were preferable to Republicans passing maps even more favorable to them.

Ohio House Speaker Jason Stephens, a Lawrence County Republican, said in a statement Monday night that the goal was always to put a legislative redistricting plan in place that would last for eight years.

"I'm glad the court respected the 7-0 vote and the fundamentally different approach from prior maps adopted by the commission," said Stephens, who praised state Rep. Jeff LaRe, a Fairfield County Republican he named to the commission. "We now have stability and can move forward."

[Cleveland.com/The Plain Dealer](#) has reached out to both Senate and House Democrats, as well as Senate Republicans, for comment on the ruling.

Redistricting activists, including O'Connor, are currently gathering signatures to put a proposed constitutional amendment on the ballot in 2024 that would replace the Ohio Redistricting Commission with a 15-member redistricting panel that current or former elected officials would be ineligible to serve on.

Jen Miller, executive director of the League of Women Voters of Ohio, responded to Monday's ruling by calling on Ohioans to support the proposed redistricting amendment.

"Ohio voters deserve fair representation in the statehouse and Congress, which can only be achieved when we take mapping out of the hands of corrupt politicians," Miller said.