

A Reform Update - Where Do Things Stand In Terms Of Redistricting And Other Needed Campaign And Government Reforms In Ohio  
(by Bill Woods for StreetVibes)

A lot is happening in Columbus that will impact how democracy works in Ohio. For this reason, the Community Issues Forum held a session on May 6th that focused on both political reforms and potentially negative legislation now before the Ohio House and Senate. Entitled "A Reform Update," [the Forum](#) featured presentations by Mia Lewis, Associate Director of Common Cause Ohio, and Catherine Turcer, Executive Director of Common Cause Ohio.

Mia Lewis began with an update on the redistricting process now underway in this state. The Republican controlled General Assembly masterminded the drawing of extremely gerrymandered political districts in 2011. Since that time, Ohio voters passed two Constitutional Amendments that reformed the process of drafting both State and Congressional District lines. With the recent completion of the U.S. Census, Lewis noted that 2021 launches the initial use of these reforms. She emphasized that it is up to Ohio citizens to insure these reforms are followed and that fair districts are drawn.



Not only do both Amendments call for compact districts that are not drawn to favor a political party, but they include requirements for public hearings and the opportunity for citizens to submit district maps for consideration. In order to involve citizens in the process, Common

Cause Ohio is working with the League of Women Voters and the ACLU to put together grassroots groups across the state to draw district maps and to participate in the public hearings required under these Amendments. Due to the late arrival of the Census data needed to draw new district lines, the process will continue through the summer and fall. To keep up to date with redistricting in Ohio, people can go to fair [districtsohio.org](http://districtsohio.org).

Much needs to be done in terms of combatting the corrosive impact of "big money" on political campaigns and government in general. One current reform promoted by Common Cause Ohio and other reform groups is a disclosure law that would reveal the large donors to special interest groups producing political ads. Special interests, noted Catherine Turcer, can now set up organizations with innocuous names like "People For a Better Society" in order to support a candidate or issue. Without the disclosure of the major donors to these groups, continued Turcer, voters are completely in the dark about who is behind these campaign activities. House Bill 13, she said, would rectify this, and she urged Forum participants to write or call their Representative to support this proposed disclosure law. She also would like to see an addition to the Bill that would strengthen prohibitions against coordinated activities between candidates running for office and the campaign organizations formed and funded by special interest groups.

A question asked at the Forum focused on whether the Ohio General Assembly was considering any new voter suppression legislation. Georgia has already passed such a law, and Florida, Texas and several other states are poised to enact Bills with voting restrictions that will

make it harder for people to vote. Responding to the Forum question, Lewis and Turcer replied that they know that such a Bill is secretly being drafted by Republican members of the Legislature, but due to the secrecy, they currently do not know the content of this proposal.

Ironically, one day after the May 6th Forum, Republican House members proposed House Bill 294. Touted as a proposal that would help insure the integrity of the voting process, it includes new restrictions that would make it harder for many Ohioans to cast their ballots. Common Cause Ohio quickly responded to House Bill 294, and asked citizens to tell their Representative to

oppose it. Specifically, the Bill would decrease the number of Drop Boxes available for receiving absentee ballots. It would also establish more rigid ID-requirements for absentee voters, and make it more difficult for active, overseas military personnel to vote. In her email to Common Cause supporters, Mia Lewis emphasized that in the name of protecting Ohio from non-existent voter fraud, House Bill 294 follows the national Republican playbook of seeking to suppress the vote. She declared: "The bill would roll back many of the same voting accommodations that helped record numbers of Ohioans cast a ballots last year."



This update on political reform in Ohio indicates how much must be done to both renew the democratic process and to prevent it from sustaining further damage. In Ohio alone, the General Assembly currently deals with three issues that deserve public attention. Citizen activists must get involved in the redistricting process, while they support House Bill 13 and oppose House Bill 294. That's a pretty big agenda for the coming weeks and months, and it will require frequent information updates from the League of Women Voters and Common Cause Ohio. (Go to common [cause.org/Ohio](http://cause.org/Ohio).)