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**MEMORANDUM**

TO: Members of the Ohio Redistricting Commission

FROM: Attorney General Dave Yost

DATE: March 18, 2022

RE: Steps forward following the decisions in *League of Women Voters of Ohio, et al. v. Ohio Redistricting Commission, et al. III* and companion cases

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Late in the evening of March 16, the Ohio Supreme Court struck down the third set of state legislative maps. Whether I, or you, agree with the majority in this most recent decision is irrelevant. Four justices have decreed what the rules for this round of redistricting shall be. You are left with little choice but to abide by them. Accordingly, this memorandum outlines a set of steps calculated to address the perceived deficiencies raised by the majority of the Court.

I offer this framework as the chief legal officer of the state, having neither a vote nor a veto over your work. This is not a map of all possible roads to the objective of complying with the elements of the Supreme Court's decisions, but one suggested route. The Commission may choose to devise another. This is offered as a means to commence your discussions.

**Meetings**

The Court made much of the relatively modest number of meetings held before the February 4, 2022 Plan was enacted, and the lateness of their calling. In its most recent order, the Court only gave the Commission ten days to produce a new map, two days of which have already expired.

The Commission apparently has scheduled a meeting for tomorrow--an excellent first step. I suggest that the commission agree at that first meeting on a schedule of meetings, and to publish it. Given that only seven days remain, daily meetings would not be excessive to respond to what some of you have correctly termed a constitutional crisis. I understand one of you has already cancelled an out-of-state trip so as to be available during this period--a commendable and appropriate sacrifice in view of the seriousness of this moment. One or more members may also arrange to participate remotely by electronic means if necessary and agreeable to the commission.

## **Staffing**

The Court directed the commission to hire new mapmakers not beholden to either political caucus. “The commission should retain an independent map drawer—who answers to all commission members, not only to the Republican legislative leaders—to draft a plan through a transparent process.” (at paragraph 30) I note that Court used "should" and not "shall," but given that this matter is heard in the Supreme Court without meaningful appeal regarding the limits of its authority, it would be wise to treat this suggestion with the degree of deference one might pay to the suggestions of one's spouse.

To assist the commission in this effort, I have retained a bipartisan duo of consulting experts through my office, who together can achieve the level of independent evaluation the court is requiring. I will make them available to the commission as a whole.

Sean Trende, a Republican analyst well-known to the readers of *Real Clear Politics*, or even causal viewers of cable news, and Bernie Grofman, a Democratic professor of political science at the University of California-Irvine, recently collaborated to produce maps for the State of Virginia. Their work was unanimously adopted by the Virginia Supreme Court.

Their charge should be simply to produce a map that complies with the Ohio Constitution and the orders of the Ohio Supreme Court. They understand the time limits of the court, the terms of the Constitution and the decisions regarding it and are prepared to go to work immediately.

Of course, you are not required to use them; I have undertaken to retain them because of the exigent circumstances created by the very short time allowed by the Court. Nor are you required to adopt their maps. It is my hope, however, that you will--their success in Virginia strongly commends them and their work to your consideration.

## **Drafting in Public**

The Court further wrote that the map-making should be done in public. “To promote transparency and increase public trust, the drafting should occur in public.” (at paragraph 44)

The actual map-making is highly technical and performed on a single work-station. I do not read the Court's opinion to say that seven people should be jockeying in a public room to direct the operator of the mouse to do this or that conflicting action.

To comply with the Court's direction, I suggest that the Commission take public actions that achieve the clause seeking transparency and public trust. To that end the Commission could publish any maps at least 24 hours before a vote; meet in public, and receive a progress reports in public from the mapmakers prior to the completion of a map, and discuss in public any sticking points between map drafts or particular districts permutations. I believe a process like this is compliant with the public map making directive issued by the Court.

## **Additional Criteria**

- The Court has now established <52% as the threshold for a "leaning" district; any index less than that is viewed by the Court as a competitive district. The Court will exclude competitive districts from its partisanship calculation. That is, if there are 32 competitive districts, then the remaining 100 districts must closely correspond to the 54 Republican to 46 Democrat ratio the majority has established.
- The Court wrote that efforts to protect incumbents are improper. Such efforts "...can neither be a legitimate and neutral goal nor comport with Article XI, Section 6(A)." (at paragraph 37)
- While competitive districts will not be counted in overall partisan balance, the Court in *dicta* was bothered by the imbalance in the number competitive districts (meaning those with an expected favorable margin of less than 52%) leaning Democratic versus those leaning Republican. While the clustering of Democrats in urban enclaves creates challenges to making Republican-leaning districts more competitive, I would be remiss if I failed to note the Court's observation.

This is meant to be a summary of the major objections in *League III*. The Constitution and the Court's actual opinions are controlling, of course, and my office stands ready to assist the Commission in navigating the multiple and sometimes competing objectives.

Finally, a note about process. I have served on several multi-member bodies, and I've learned it is always a temptation to love too much my own advice, and my own theory of law. I keep this passage from the Ohio Jury Instructions handy, and often review it before meetings:

*It is not wise to immediately express a determination to insist upon a certain verdict, because if your sense of pride is aroused, you may hesitate to change your position even if you later decide you are wrong.*

*Consult with one another, consider each other's views and deliberate with the objective of reaching an agreement, if you can do so without disturbing your individual judgment.*

*Each of you must decide... for yourself, but you should do so only after a discussion and consideration of the case with (the others).*

*Do not hesitate to change an opinion if convinced that it is wrong. However, you should not surrender honest convictions in order to be congenial or to reach a verdict solely because of the opinion of other(s).*

The hour is late, and I do not envy your task. I hope this memorandum has made it easier to "begin again."