

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF OHIO

League of Women Voters of Ohio, A. Philip
Randolph Institute of Ohio, Tom Harry, Tracy
Beavers, Valerie Lee, Iris Meltzer, Sherry
Rose, Bonnie Bishop,

Relators,

v.

Ohio Redistricting Commission, Michael
DeWine, Frank LaRose, Keith Faber, Matt
Huffman, Robert R. Cupp, Vernon Sykes, and
Emilia S. Sykes,

Respondents.

APPORTIONMENT CASE

Original Action Pursuant to
Ohio Const., Art. XI and
S.Ct. Prac.R. 14.03

2021-1193

**Relators' Supplemental Brief
on Sua Sponte Order**

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INTRODUCTION

The Court has asked the parties to address “[w]hat impact, if any,” Article XI, Section 8(C)(1) of the Ohio Constitution has on the Court’s authority to grant relators’ requested relief “when the Ohio Redistricting Commission adopted the district plan by a simple majority vote of the commission.” The answer, in short, is none. This Court’s authority to declare the maps unconstitutional in this case, and to order the Commission to reconvene either to adopt a new general assembly district plan or to revise the previous one, is defined by Sections 9(A) and 9(B). Article XI Section 8, titled “Impasse procedure,” consists entirely of procedural provisions and does not affect jurisdiction or remedy. Section 8(C)(1) sets the beginning date and the default expiration date for maps approved by simple majority vote under that procedure, but does not restrict or limit the Court’s authority to review such maps.

Notably, no Respondent in this action has argued otherwise. To read Section 8(C)(1) to restrict this Court’s remedial authority would contradict the Article’s plain text, its structure, and the voters’ intent in enacting it. Disturbingly, such a reading would also provide a windfall to an intractable partisan majority, by rendering any plan passed by force of its majority completely immune to any challenge under *any* part of Article XI. This means that any 4-year impasse map could violate not only the Section 6 safeguards at issue here, but also any and all of the other rules contained in Sections 2, 3, 4, and elsewhere in the Article, with impunity. That is inconsistent with the intent of the voters who enacted Article XI.

Moreover, any suggestion that the provisions of Section 8(C)(1) somehow limit this Court’s purview over violations of Section 6 is undercut by the language in the immediately following provision, Section 8(C)(2). That provision states that, in the event that a map is enacted pursuant to Section 8(C)(1), the Commission “shall” provide a statement explaining the

compliance of the Enacted Plan with Section 6(b). That provision cannot be squared with the suggestion that an 8(C)(1) map is exempt from the requirements of Section 6.

In short, any suggestion that Section 8(C)(1) limits this Court’s authority to issue an order to remedy violations of Section 6 would render the entire substance of Article XI a nullity *specifically and exclusively* when it is most needed: whenever a majority party alone uses its power to gerrymander.

LEGAL BACKGROUND

Sections 1 and 8 of Article XI, as amended by the voters in 2015, outline the procedures according to which the Ohio Redistricting Commission must adopt a state legislative map.

A. Section 8: Impasse Procedure

As its title suggests, Section 8 serves a discrete purpose: establishing the procedures for the Commission to follow in the event of an impasse. If the Commission is unable to reach consensus with two opposition members by September 1 as prescribed by Section 1, it can use Section 8’s procedures to introduce a proposed General Assembly plan by simple majority vote. The Commission then has until September 15 to adopt a final map. Ohio Constitution, Article XI, § 8(A)(3). If a plan is adopted by September 15 with two members of the opposition party voting in favor, the plan would be in force for ten years. *Id.* § 8(B).

Section 8(C)(1) prescribes the terms of redistricting plans passed pursuant to simple majority vote. Under Section 8(C)(1)(A), a plan adopted by a simple majority vote “shall remain effective until two general elections for the house of representatives have occurred under the plan,” *i.e.*, for four years, “[e]xcept as otherwise provided in division (C)(1)(b).”¹ *Id.* § 8(C)(1)(a). Under

¹ Division (C)(1)(b) applies to plans that have been adopted “to replace a plan that ceased to be effective under division (C)(1)(a) of this section before a year ending in the numeral one[.]”

8(C)(1)(B), a plan that is adopted “by a simple majority vote of the commission . . . to replace a plan that ceased to be effective under division (C)(1)(a) of this section before a year ending in the numeral one shall remain effective until a year ending in the numeral one, except as provided in Section 9 of this article.”²

When a simple majority plan is adopted under either 8(C)(1)(a) or 8(C)(1)(b), then pursuant to Section 8(C)(2), the Commission “*shall include* a statement explaining what the commission determined to be the statewide preferences of the voters of Ohio and the manner in which the statewide proportion of districts in the plan whose voters, based on statewide state and federal partisan general election results during the last ten years, favor each political party corresponds closely to those preferences.” *Id.* § 8(C)(2) (emphasis added). Thus, even with a map passed along partisan lines, the Commission is required to consider representational fairness, to eschew partisan self-dealing, and attempt to achieve partisan fairness in its map.

Section 8(D) outlines procedures for replacing “a general assembly district plan adopted under division (C)(1)(a) of this section [that] ceases to be effective.” Specifically, it provides that “the commission shall be reconstituted as provided in Section 1 of this article, convene, and

² A plan “cease[s] to be effective under division (C)(1)(a)” (emphasis added) after “two general elections for the house of representatives have occurred under the plan,” as set forth in division (C)(1)(a). A plan passed pursuant to division (C)(1)(a), and not overturned by this Court, must therefore be replaced after two general election cycles by a plan passed pursuant to division (C)(1)(b).

A plan does not cease to be effective “under division (C)(1)(a),” however, when that plan is overturned by this Court pursuant to Section 9. *Compare* § 8(D) (“After a general assembly district plan adopted under division (C)(1)(a) of this section ceases to be effective . . .”) (emphasis added). As a result, a plan passed by simple majority vote to replace a plan overturned by this court pursuant to Section 9 must be adopted pursuant to Section 8(C)(1)(a). Of course, if this court overturns a plan pursuant to Section 9, it is also possible that the Commission could enact a bi-partisan plan and not use Section 8 at all.

adopt a new general assembly district plan in accordance with this article, to be used until the next time for redistricting under this article.”

B. Section 9: Jurisdiction and Remedy

Section 8 is silent on this Court’s jurisdiction or judicial remedies, as those matters are expressly covered by Article XI, Section 9. Section 9 gives this Court “exclusive, original jurisdiction in all cases arising under this article” without limitation. *Id.* § 9(A). Section 9(B) authorizes this Court to remedy any violation of any valid provision of Article XI.

Specifically, Section 9(B) allows the Court to issue a remedial order “[i]n the event that any section of this constitution relating to redistricting, any general assembly district plan made by the Ohio redistricting commission, or any district is determined to be invalid . . .” *Id.* § 9(B). In that event, “notwithstanding any other provisions of this constitution, the commission shall be reconstituted” in order to “determine a general assembly district plan . . . to be used until the next time for redistricting under this article in conformity with such provisions of this constitution as are then valid.” *Id.*

ARGUMENT

A. Interpreting 8(C)(1) to Preclude Judicial Review For Maps Passed By Simple Majority Vote Leads to Inconsistency and Absurdity

Nothing in Section 8(C)(1) limits this Court’s remedial authority, much less immunizes a four-year map from judicial review. Such an interpretation, if adopted, would necessarily preclude remedies for *any* violation of Article XI in the event of a plan approved by a simple majority—which, of course, is the situation in which partisan gerrymandering is most likely to occur, and so where judicial review is most warranted. *See AAAA Enterprises, Inc. v. River Place Cmty. Urban Redevelopment Corp.*, 50 Ohio St. 3d 157, 160, 553 N.E.2d 597 (“We must not abdicate the

historic role of the courts in the protection of constitutional rights through the exercise of the power of judicial review.”).

The result would be antithetical to the function of the entire Article. A simple partisan majority of Commission members could, for instance, draw multimember districts, in violation of Article XI, Section 2; draw non-contiguous districts, in violation of Sections 3(B)(3) and 4(A); draw districts that split counties, municipalities, and townships with abandon, in violation of Sections 3(C)-(E) and 4(B); and draw districts that are entirely partisan and non-compact, in violation of Section 6, with no possibility that these—or any other—blatant violations could be reviewed. Rather than encouraging bipartisan cooperation, such a reading of Article XI would reward members of the Redistricting Commission who adopt a plan along strict party lines. This could not have been what Ohio’s voters intended when they amended Article XI in 2015 to strengthen its protections against partisan gerrymandering. *See* Br. at 4-6. *See, e.g., City of Centerville v. Knab*, 162 Ohio St.3d 623, 629, 2020-Ohio-5219, ¶ 22, 166 N.E.3d 1167 (“In construing constitutional text that was ratified by direct vote, we consider how the language would have been understood by the voters”); *State ex rel. Sylvania Home Tel. Co. v. Richards*, 94 Ohio St. 287, 294, 114 N.E. 263 (1916) (“[i]t is the duty of the court to ascertain and give effect to the intent of the people” in constitutional interpretation).

This interpretation would also controvert the interpretations of the parties to this case, *all of whom have explicitly acknowledged* that the Court has authority to invalidate a four-year map passed by simple majority vote, and to order the Commission to adopt a new plan. *See* HC Br. at 5; SEO Br. at 9; Commission Br. at 1; Sykes Br. at 33; Reply Br. at 1-3, 19-20. The parties’ unanimous agreement on this question is no coincidence; the only reasonable interpretation of

Article XI is that plans passed pursuant to Section 8(C)(1)(a) are subject to judicial remedy under Section 9.

Lastly, this interpretation is irreconcilable with Section 9(D)(3)(c). That Section expressly contemplates that this Court would be “considering a plan adopted under division (C) of Section 8” for the purposes of providing a remedy for violating certain district standards. Notably, nothing in Section 9(D)(3) provides that it is the *exclusive* remedy in a challenge to a plan adopted under Section 8(C). *See infra* section B. The language of Section 9(D)(3) does, however, buttress the conclusion that maps enacted under Section 8(C) are reviewable.

B. The Plain Text of Section 9 Grants This Court Authority to Remedy Any Four-Year Map That Violates Article XI

The text of Section 9(B) makes clear that plans adopted pursuant to a simple majority vote remain subject to this Court’s authority. *See generally* Br. at 9 (noting that 9(B) provides a “global remedy”). To remove any question about its reach, the section provides the Court with authority to order the Commission to reconvene and draw a new plan, “notwithstanding any other provisions of this constitution.” The mere absence of any specific reference to Section 9 contained within Section 8(C)(1)(a) cannot negate this court’s authority to order remedies against plans passed by simple partisan majority. *See City of Cleveland v. State*, 157 Ohio St.3d 330, 336, 2019-Ohio-3820, ¶ 23, 136 N.E.3d 466 (when the Constitution’s text is “plain and unambiguous, we may not resort to other forms of constitutional interpretation”).

C. The Structure and Context of Section 8(C)(1) Establishes That It Was Not Intended to Limit Remedies

Section 8 is entitled “Impasse Procedure.” That title accurately describes the section’s contents, which cover procedures for adopting a redistricting plan after the deadline required by Section 1 has passed, and the default tenure of plans adopted according to those procedures. *See City of Cleveland* at ¶ 23 (the “structure of the Constitution” may be considered if plain text does

not resolve the issue). Nowhere does this section address this Court's jurisdiction or authority to remedy an unconstitutional map. Section 9, in contrast, expressly addresses the "Jurisdiction of the Supreme Court" and "effect of determination of unconstitutionality." The Court should not force an unnatural reading that would not only extend Section 8 beyond its stated scope into subject matter fully addressed by Section 9, but would radically limit the latter's reach.

Interpretation of Section 8(C)(1) is also informed by 8(C)(2), which requires the Redistricting Commission to produce a statement explaining compliance with Section 6(B) for any "final general assembly district plan adopted under division C(1)(a) or (b)" of Section 8. This requirement functions, in part, *to facilitate* judicial review. It would be a pointless exercise if redistricting plans adopted pursuant to Section 8(C)(1)(a) could not be remedied, including for violations of Section 6(B). *See* Br. at 8. In fact, this provisions explicit reference to both Sections 8(C)(1)(a) and (b) indicates that plans passed under either provision are subject to this Court's jurisdiction.

CONCLUSION

Accordingly, Relators respectfully maintain their request that this Court:

1. Declare that the maps that Respondents adopted are invalid for failure to comply with Article XI of the Ohio Constitution; and
2. Order the Commission to adopt a new general assembly district plan or, at a minimum, to amend the maps that Respondents adopted to correct the violations, as contemplated in Article XI, Section 9(B).

Respectfully submitted,

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