Ohio is losing two U.S. House seats because of slow population growth. The Republican plan for 16 districts essentially maintains the current makeup following the 2010 elections and subjects each party to a loss of a congressional seat.

By JAMES W. WADE III

Staff Reporter

The Ohio Supreme Court ruled that the attempt of the legislature to add an appropriation to the congressional reapportionment bill, HB 319 , did not remove the bill from Ohio's constitutional right of a referendum.

Last week, Secretary of State Jon Husted and State Attorney General Mike DeWine refused to accept the initial petition of the Ohio Democratic Party and other groups seeking to place the maps on a referendum ballot on the grounds that HB 319 contained an appropriation, and thus was not subject to a referendum.

Following the Ohio Supreme Court's unanimous decision that the people of Ohio can exercise their right to wage a referendum against the Republicans' unfair Congressional maps, Ohioans

for Fair Districts held a press conference today to call on Republican leaders to sit down with Democrats and redraw the Congressional lines.

Ohioans for Fair Districts announced its intention to conduct a statewide referendum in the event that Republicans do not support a new, fair map. Former Dayton Mayor Rhine McLin, a member of the Ohioans for Fair Districts committee, called the Supreme Court's decision "a victory for democracy."

McLin noted that today, Ohioans for Fair Districts is asking the Supreme Court to restart the 90-day period for the collection of signatures to repeal the unfair Congressional maps. "The entire 90-day period must be given so that Ohioans can fully exercise their constitutional right to challenge House Bill 319," she said.

Ohio Democratic Party Chairman Chris Redfern said, "Statehouse Republicans have a choice: They can sit down with Democratic leaders and produce a fair map with bipartisan support, or they can create uncertainty in our next election."

Redfern said that districts must be balanced, fair and competitive in order for a compromise to

be reached. He also noted that the map must retain a majority-minority district in Cuyahoga County, currently held by Congresswoman Marcia Fudge.

"While there are many questions about what will happen next in this process, one thing is clear: We will continue fighting until fair maps are drawn," Redfern concluded.

House Speaker William Batchelder, R-Medina, said in a press release Monday, however, that Republicans “are astounded that Chairman Redfern is not interested in maintaining a fair and legal map, particularly since Democrats in the House and Senate clearly did not participate in the process until it was too late.”

Two Democrats are targeted in northeast Ohio, where U.S. Rep. Dennis J. Kucinich of Cleveland would be drawn into a district that favors fellow Democratic Rep. Marcy Kaptur of Toledo. It also would draw U.S. Rep. Betty Sutton, D-Barberton, into a district that favors U.S. Rep. Jim Renacci, R-Wadsworth.

The Republicans in the General Assembly tried to initially pass HB 319 as an emergency measure to avoid a referendum, but as the Ohio Constitution states, it takes a supermajority of the General Assembly to declare a bill an emergency measure.

The move created only two arguably competitive districts, with parts of the maps that give

Republicans an almost guarantee to hold ten of the sixteen congressional district in Ohio, despite the fact that there are millions more registered Democrats than Republicans in the State.

“I am grateful that Ohio’s Supreme Court made up almost entirely of republicans voted unanimously to protect the rights of the citizens of Ohio to pursue a referendum. This decision is a reminder that the power in our democracy rests in the hands of the people, not power hungry politicians more concerned about maintaining their seats in Congress than serving the people they are elected to represent. All elected officials regardless of political affiliation need to take this decision seriously and reflect on its implications,” said State Sen. Nina Turner.

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State Rep. Tracy Maxwell Heard, D-Columbus, also said she will definitely take a look at running for a seat. “I like the legislative process and this would be the next step for me,” she said. Heard said she likes that the map “creates a Democratic and heavily minority seat, and its likely there would be a minority representative. We need more of that in the Congress.”