

UPDATE: writing competition for law professors and students

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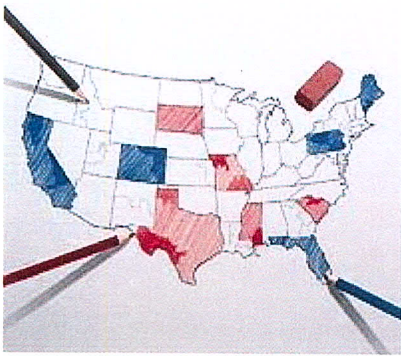
To: Dan Vicuna <DVicuna@commoncause.org>;

As you might remember from a previous email, Common Cause is sponsoring a writing competition to identify new legal strategies to end gerrymandering in the United States. With exciting developments in cases coming out of Maryland and Wisconsin, we have decided to update the topic to reflect the opportunities these cases present. Please see details below on how we have adjusted the topic and feel free to distribute this information to your faculty and students. Updates, submission requirements, and information about our 2015 winners are also available at www.commoncause.org/gerrymanderstandard.

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2016 First Amendment Gerrymander Standard Writing Competition

Due March 27, 2016



In December 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a unanimous ruling in *Shapiro v. McManus* allowing a First Amendment challenge to Maryland's congressional districts to move forward. Separately, a three-judge federal district court panel rejected a motion to dismiss in *Whitford v. Nichol*, a case challenging Wisconsin's state legislative Assembly districts. These cases challenging partisan gerrymanders have potentially significant consequences for fair democratic representation. Either could open the door to a ruling

against political gerrymandering that leads to its demise.

The Supreme Court has long suggested there is a limit for what is acceptable partisan gerrymandering, but like obscenity, so far the line is undefined and left to courts to know it when they see it. The Court has said that it is willing to hear constitutional challenges to partisan gerrymandering, but existing legal theories have been insufficient to empower citizens and advocates with the tools they need to overturn partisan

gerrymanders in court. Common Cause's 2016 "Gerrymander Standard" Writing Competition is your chance to change that.

For the second year, we invite legal and social science practitioners, scholars, and students to submit papers that will identify partisan gerrymanders and distinguish them from districts drawn using neutral redistricting principles while developing legal theories or arguments that could be used by courts to declare partisan gerrymanders unconstitutional. This year, we are asking authors to focus specifically on the First Amendment issue in *Shapiro* and *Whitford* to demonstrate why the drawing of Maryland's congressional districts or Wisconsin's Assembly districts is a partisan gerrymander that should be condemned under the First Amendment. Winning papers are selected by a distinguished panel of democracy scholars. For contest updates, go to www.commoncause.org/gerrymanderstandard.

Winning Authors Receive:

- Prize money: 1st place: \$5,000, 2nd place: \$3,000, 3rd place: \$2,000
- Publication in a leading academic journal
- Payment of travel expenses to present papers at a national redistricting reform symposium

See submission requirements [here](#).

If you have any questions, contact Dan Vicuna at (213) 623-1216 or contest@commoncause.org.