

WRITTEN STATEMENT AGAINST HJR 19 AND REQUEST TO PROVIDE TESTIMONY

Chairman Blessing and Committee Members:

I am here today to testify against HJR 19 what I affectionately refer to as the “Bust the Citizen’s Initiative Bill” because I believe that this Resolution will, effectively, deny the citizens of this State the right of referendum guaranteed them under the Ohio Constitution. For a constituent who has made numerous calls to her representatives in this body, having never spoken to a human at either the office of my state senator or representative and who has never received the courtesy of a return call, email or letter as requested, the right of referendum has become a precious commodity to me as perhaps it is the only way for my voice to be heard.

As a volunteer who worked tirelessly with hundreds of other volunteers throughout the State on the campaign to end gerrymandering by way of citizens initiative I learned how difficult it is to meet the current requirements of obtaining signatures constituting 10% of the total votes cast in the gubernatorial race. Of those signatures, circulators must collect 5% of the votes cast in each of at least 44 out of the 88 counties. In the last gubernatorial election, approximately 4 million votes were cast. Thus circulators, until the next election, would need to secure approximately 400,000 valid signatures. In reality, circulators would need to collect between 500,000-600,000 signatures in at least 44 counties.

This Resolution requires that the petitions be filed by April 1 of the year in which an election is to be held and that signatures are only good for six (6) months from the date signed. Therefore circulators would need to collect approximately 80,000-100,000 signatures per month. Pursuant to this Resolution, collection would have to occur between the months of October through March. Many thoughts flood my mind when I consider this and I would like to share a few with this Committee.

- ◆ Why limit the time period for validity? And why limit it from October through March? My thought - this is an intentional act to eliminate the ability of citizens to petition for referendum and to silence the electorate. Everyone who has ever worked on, reviewed or witnessed a petition effort knows that the best times to collect signatures is during the months of May through September when the State of Ohio is bustling with activities like Art Festivals, July 4th celebrations, parades for various holidays. Why? Because circulators can reach the greatest number of signators in one place. So why would the sponsors of this bill purposely limit collection from October-March when most festivities have ended and we are heading into the coldest months in the State, students are away for Spring and Christmas Breaks and families are vacationing or getting ready for the holidays, thereby severely limiting signature collection and excluding the crucial months? I do not think I need to answer the question as we will all know why if this gets voted out of committee.

- ◆ Is it a coincidence that this Resolution comes after the recent elections when all but two (2) members of the committee on gerrymandering will be Republican in 2021 when the new maps are to be redrawn? The initial Senate legislation dealing with redistricting drew loud citizen outcry as it delineated the maps as a Resolution and thus the maps would not be subject to referendum. Citizens acted in good faith giving up the concept of an Independent committee to redraft the maps. The legislature withdrew the resolution language advising the citizens that the maps would be subject to referendum. This Resolution effectively takes away that promise to the Ohio citizens. Is this evidence that the legislature acted in bad faith and mislead the citizens of this state? I do not have to answer that as we all know the answer if this legislation gets voted out of committee.

- ◆ Why must the initiative pass by not less than 60% rather than a majority? Why another stumbling block for the voices of citizens to be heard? Why should citizens' initiatives be held to a greater vote? I do not think I need to answer that because if this gets voted out of committee we all will know why.

I understand that the legislature claims that this Resolution is to prevent outside money from supporting these initiatives yet I see no objection nor inclination by this body to limit the influx of outside or dark money for their election campaigns. In fact, this legislation will only foster the influx of outside money as to meet the deadline to collect signatures, it will only be possible with paid circulators, (if it is even possible to get done with paid circulators). Further, to require 60% of the vote may require advertising, so outside funding would be used to advertise. And consider how much outside money will flow in to advertise for this Resolution from outside groups who seek to silence citizens for their own self interests. Volunteers and citizens groups do not have the money to pay circulators and for advertising. So this rationale will not fool the citizens of this State as this Resolution will defeat its claimed intended purpose.

Further this Resolution makes it more difficult to pass legislation by increasing the required number of signatures from 3% to 5% of the electors. All that work for the legislature to have the ability to amend, repeal or suspend that very same legislation after a year. Why would lawmakers want to repeal legislation voted upon by the electorate a year later? The changes do not require any explanation as to why such action was taken by the legislature. Should not the legislature be required to answer to the citizens for its actions repealing what they voted for? So we appease the voters and a then a year later betray them.

The legislature should be working to restore the faith of Ohio citizens in this body and yet this Resolution only demonstrates that this body has no interest in the voices of its constituents.

I would ask that this committee resoundingly reject this resolution and send a message that the voices of the citizens of Ohio do matter to this legislative body.

Respectfully,

Andrea R. Yagoda
7598 Concord Road
Delaware, Ohio 43015
740-881-5713
andreayagoda@aol.com