

Chairman Blessing, Vice Chair Reineke, Ranking Member Clyde, and members of the House Government Accountability & Oversight Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Barb Fleeter. I have lived in Columbus for 29 years. In my day job, I am an engineer. I come here representing regular Ohio citizens - not lobbyists, nor special interest groups or any other influencers. I am strongly opposed to HJR19 because I believe Ohio citizens need a fair and reasonable pathway to affect and influence how Ohio works.

I live in U.S. Congressional District 12, Ohio House District 24, and Ohio Senate District 16. My voice and representation have been deeply affected by the drawing of district lines. The maps were strategically drawn to dilute my vote. And the legislative body entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring citizens fair and competitive representation failed me.

When serious work began on the Fair Districts ballot initiative in the Spring of 2017, I was all in.

On May 3rd, 2017, I attended a training for the petition drive put on by the Fair Districts = Fair Elections Coalition. I organized a group of my neighbors into a sub team that would work and contribute to the larger effort. On May 22nd, the Attorney General approved the ballot language, and on May 23rd, around my dining room table, I trained my neighborhood group - Just like that, we had become one of the thousand points of light in this effort.

20 neighbors – all but 2 with full time jobs ... worked for the next 4 weeks, with a deadline of early July to make the fall ballot. We hit libraries, parks, farmer's markets, and festivals all over Central Ohio. By the deadline, our neighborhood sub team had gathered 1538 signatures, engaging with voters from 36 different counties. Using the current Ohio congressional map as a starting point, we engaged in meaningful conversations with voters across the political spectrum and developed strong support for the simple idea that more competitive and representative districts produces better government for the people.

By deadline time, more signatures were still needed. Grassroot collection would continue into 2018. The activities of this engaged citizenry would put pressure on the legislature to craft a reasonable approach to the drawing of districts. My subgroup had stepped up to be a part of a deeply engaged and committed group of Ohioans, to the betterment of the state.

HJR19 would drastically curtail these activities. We, as unpaid collectors, depended on large public, accessible events to help us engage with lots and lots of voters. The proposed resolution would limit the gathering to the months of October through the beginning of April – presumably to limit access to festivals and all other outdoor events where we had had success. Additionally, limiting the collection period to 180 days would make it likely that only those initiatives funded by deep pockets to pay canvassers would be successful. And increasing the required vote margin to 60% is another obstacle seemingly put in place to silence the citizens. This resolution exposes a legislative blind spot. Citizens need a reasonable pathway to influence how Ohio works.

In my personal experience, the ability to draft and work for constitutional amendments via ballot initiatives has been a critical tool to use as a check on a legislature that may not be listening or acting on issues that are important to the electorate.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this citizen blocking bill. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

I will now take any questions you may have.