

Date: December 3, 2018
To: **The Government Accountability and Oversight Committee**
Chair: Rep. Louis Blessing, III
Ranking member: Rep Kathleen Clyde

Subject: **Written testimony to be submitted to the committee regarding proposed H. J. R. No. 19, sponsored by Rep. LaTourette and Rep. Holmes to Modify Ballot Initiative Process**

From: Maureen D. Welch
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Rep. Blessing, Rep. Clyde, and members of the Government Accountability and Oversight Committee, I am asking you to vote NO on H. J. R. No 19 which seeks to modify the Initiative Process. Please do not put this resolution before the legislature for a vote.

As a citizen of Ohio, I have participated in circulating petitions for the all-volunteer, Fair Districts Ballot Initiative effort. I know what it takes to reach just one county's baseline goal, let alone 88. I know how many hours volunteer citizens must stand outside libraries, post offices, on the sidewalks at festivals and music events, walk parade routes and find public places where the circulation of petitions is permitted.

As a volunteer I participated in many aspects of circulating petitions; from approaching venues to ask if we could collect to coordinating other citizens to help collect. I donated hundreds of volunteer hours to circulating petitions and coordinating the efforts of others. And with a huge volunteer effort and 9 months, we were getting within reach of our baseline goal, (BUT NOT TO THE GOAL) of 3% of the votes of the last gubernatorial race. That is when the Ohio legislature contacted League of Women Voters and Common Cause Ohio to negotiate redistricting reform legislation. I can only imagine the funding necessary to pay all of the volunteers that worked that effort.

I submit my opinions as a volunteer who collected signatures on the sidewalks of Ohio. I am not an expert in ballot initiatives, but I am an expert on what is like to stand outside and try to educate Ohio citizens about a ballot initiative and why it is needed. I know inclement weather is a barrier to circulating petitions. I know how many signatures a person can expect to collect in two hours on a sunny seventy degree day while standing on a sidewalk outside of a post office or library (about 18-22 signatures). Based on my experience, the provisions outlined in H. J. R. No 19 will place an onerous and difficult burden on the citizens of Ohio and on grassroots organizations that depend on citizen volunteers. I am concerned about the following:

The deadline for signatures changes to April 1 and signatures gathered will only be valid for 180 days. I find this outrageous and cruel. Circulating petitions for the Fair Districts Ballot Initiative was a great experience and an opportunity to talk with Ohio citizens from all walks of life and political backgrounds. As a volunteer I was meet with respect and had meaningful and enlightening conversations with all sorts of fellow citizens. This resolutions' restrictions will stifle meaningful discourse between citizens. Signatures will only be collected in the coldest and most inclement weather in Ohio which is a significant deterrent to grassroots and volunteer efforts. From experience, I know that volunteer citizens who may be willing to circulate petitions will find standing outside in single digit temperatures and windy

conditions challenging and prohibitive. Snow, sleet, high winds, and low temperatures are all deterrents to petition circulation. Many citizens, due to health concerns will be unable to volunteer because of this. I know from experience, citizens who will stop in sunny, warm, and temperate conditions, will not stop to be educated about an initiative, ask questions and take the time to decide to sign a petition when frigid temperatures make it hard to even hold the pen and the wind is not only blowing papers around but making it hard to have a conversation. I know from experience, finding indoor venues that will allow petition circulation is very difficult.

The 180-day life of a signature makes signature collecting a very daunting proposition for a grassroots organization without huge coffers with which to organize the effort and pay people to circulate petitions. The cost of educating the public, organizing staff, and mobilizing people to get the required number of signatures in under 180 days will mean only well-funded organizations and the wealthy will be able to afford to attempt a ballot initiative.

Finally, there is more than just collecting signatures to putting together a ballot initiative; once petitions are circulated, they must be reviewed in-house and prepared for submission, which all takes time. With a 180-day signature life and an April 1 deadline, this resolution is cutting the time that petitions can reasonably be circulated to under 6 months. How does this benefit Ohio citizens seeking to be active in direct democracy?

Instead of a simple majority, a ballot initiative must get 60% of voters to vote yes to pass. Why is this so? From my reading, only about 30% of ballot initiatives pass when they do make it in front of the voters. Ohio voters scrutinize ballot initiatives. There is no need to hold Ohio citizens to a higher standard. A simple majority is adequate.

Initial signature requirement for a ballot initiative increases from 3 to 5 percent of the vote for Governor in the prior midterm election. The number of signatures necessary overall and by county are dependent on 3% of the vote for governor in the prior midterm. Voter turnout was quite high in 2018 when compared with the 2014 midterm which effectively increases the number of signatures needed for a ballot initiative without changing the baseline of 3%. Because people move their residence or signatures are invalid for other reasons, the number of signatures collected must already be closer to double the 3% to ensure the correct number of valid signatures. Increasing the number of signatures needed to 5% is unnecessary and again, places an undue burden on the grassroots organizations. In order to ensure valid signatures, double the baseline percentage must already be collected. An increase to 5% is NOT necessary.

As a citizen who has been actively involved in the ballot initiative process, it is apparent to me that H. J. R. No 19 will place an undue burden on the citizens of Ohio and volunteers who value their right to direct democracy. I do not wish to have my right to direct democracy restricted or limited by tighter and onerous measures that do not serve the citizens of Ohio in any way. I urge you to vote NO on H. J. R. No 19.

Respectfully submitted,
Maureen D. Welch