

Date: December 3, 2018

To: The Government Accountability and Oversight Committee
Chair: Rep Louis Blessing, III
Ranking member: Rep Kathleen Clyde

Subject: Written Testimony in Opposition to HJR 19

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Representative Blessing, Representative Clyde and the members of the Government Accountability and Oversight committee.. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you all today.

I am from the Cleveland area and I worked extensively on the 2017 Fair districts proposal. I believe my experience collecting signatures and managing volunteers for the League of Women Voters and the Fair Districts coalition can give you a window into what it takes to get an issue on the ballot.

When I first heard about the petition drive, I was overwhelmed by the idea of gathering 305,000 valid signatures, let alone creating a cushion to account for bad signatures. With trepidation I signed up to collect 200 signatures and had no idea how I was going to accomplish it.

Fast forward a few weeks, and this became a full time job. In 9 months I personally collected 3747 signatures for this ballot issue and oversaw the efforts of 100's of volunteers, which resulted in over 44,000 signatures over a multi county area. I worked on a calendar and sign ups for volunteers, contributed to weekly newsletters, sought permission to attend events talked to groups and recruited volunteers, met people at my home so they could check in petitions, provided training and motivation to volunteers, drove petitions to Columbus from Cleveland and campaigned for Issue 1.

For every signature I got on a non-partisan common sense Issue, I likely talked to 10 people. Some had already signed, some were suspicious of me, others engaged in dialogue and walked away and other walked away while I was explaining the issue to potential signers. I estimate that I had personal contact with over 35,000 people. To do this over a 9 month period, I worked both days most every weekend, lost my voice, got sunburned, was rained on, stood outside in the wind and snow. I did this as a volunteer, because this issue is important to me.

I missed much of my last summer that my daughter was home before she went away to college. She would stop by at a summer festival with her friends just so she could see me and say hello.

With what is being proposed, though seeing my daughter with her friends would not be possible, because we would not be able to collect at summer festivals – we would be collecting in the coldest months of the year. The only people I know who would stand outside all winter are ones that are getting paid

It is extraordinary for one volunteer to commit or get over 100 signatures. On average it can take over an hour to produce 5 signatures. The effort that I gave over 9 months, would not be close to being enough to get an issue on the ballot under HJR19 if you cloned 200 volunteers like me. But if you paid people....just maybe moneyed interests could get issues on the ballot to conform to the standards in HJR 19. Is that what you want? Moneyed interests to have even more control over legislation? In fact I kind of wonder if moneyed interests aren't the ones pushing this legislation now.

Truthfully, getting signatures is a grind for any volunteer – of all of the volunteers who worked on the fair districts petition I never heard one say “I LOVE getting signatures” But we do it because it is the one way in Ohio, where we can have a significant voice and participate in Democracy.

HJR19 imposes unreasonable hurdles for grassroots activists to put important issues before voters on the ballot.

I feel like the people who wrote this legislation do not actually understand what it takes to get signatures to this degree and if they did know, they would understand that HJR 19 would increase the likelihood that the only groups who could get issues on the ballot would be those with money. A 60% threshold for passage only exaggerates the need for money to run a campaign. HJR 19 will lock out citizen initiated grassroots and volunteer organizations would be locked out of the process

I am more afraid of the influence that money will continue to have over our legislation. If you vote yes on this, it sends a signal that you are more afraid of the voice of ordinary people of Ohio than you are of opening yet another door to big money and lobbyists.

Thank you for your time.

Susanne L. Dyke