

HJR 19

1. Simple majority vs 60%
2. Define frivolous ballot issues
3. Deadline to submit April 1st vs. July 1st
4. Signatures only valid for 180 days vs. no expiration date
5. 3% of voting population vs 5%

Good morning. My name is Valerie Charms Mason. I'm a resident of Beachwood, Ohio and I'm here today because I'm vastly concerned about the impending passage of HJR19.

In a perfect world, our system works. In the real world, things get complicated, but that's life. Very few things are perfectly black and white; cut and dry. I could spend an hour stating an opinion that would be just as easily opposed by the person standing next to me. The beauty of our system is that our citizens get to vote so that their voices can effect societal change. Perhaps we disagree, but that doesn't necessarily make the other person wrong. This, is exactly why our founding fathers specifically setup our democracy and our constitutions so that they could be amended and changed.

Yes, we elect representatives to bring forth ideas and positions that the people feel strongly about. But let's be honest – many other positions never see the light of day. We know this fundamentally. Our government should never be allowed to put forth the excuse of lack of time, lack of resources, lack of interest; it doesn't matter. The voice of the people still needs to be heard, The people have given their time and their resources to let you know how many of its citizens would like to see a change occur. Often, these initiatives are borne of small interest groups that can sometimes only put together small marketing, and advertising plans, in order to get their message out and attract those would be affected. But there is a process that needs to be allowed to happen. These processes require time and the government should not discount the efforts of its constituents.

As a recent volunteer, I have seen just how difficult it is to get VALID signatures for an initiative and the small window of time in which we must gather those signatures. Our current standard of July 1st is difficult enough –

giving only 6 months to obtain signatures. Now we are supposed to achieve even more by April 1st, who actually believes that will allow any petition to invoke change? There are many worthy, underfunded organizations, with non-paid volunteers who commit their personal time with no desire of compensation. Predictably, there is typically a lack of volunteers in these situations, which means organizations need more time to get the word out and see how many agree with them. Is it fair, and is it even right to ask for more from these same people? It makes the task seem insurmountable and will drive no one to the challenge of bettering our policies and laws. Let's not forget that these signatures represent the voices of people, more importantly they represent your constituents!

Frivolity notwithstanding, as a citizen of Ohio, I can tell you that I will never willingly support the reduction of citizens' rights, It is my right and yours to be heard, and there is already a process in place that works and are only rarely moved upon by a simple majority, and not typically in an efficient manner. Why? Because it's already extremely restrictive and time consuming. Now we need further restrictions imposed to see to it that it becomes most likely impossible?

Raising the percentage to 60% versus a simple majority AND simultaneously requiring 5% versus 3% of the voting population in such a short time period puts undue strain on the smaller underfunded activist groups who are merely trying to get their positions considered. To be sure – this isn't a Republican or Democrat issue – this involves all of us, regardless of political affiliation. Giving away our powers as citizens is a grave mistake that should never be granted. We are a government of the people, by the people, for the people. I ask you to consider the state of our government presently: fighting, warring, blocking, stalling, bargaining, exploiting. It's happening, and we already feel powerless do anything about it. Ask yourselves then, all of you, do you really want to reduce so much more control in our process? How many times have we seen rule changes in our federal government, that later come back to haunt us? When the power flips to the other side of the aisle, will you request your voice be returned? A petition put forth today may seem frivolous and a waste of time by the present party in power. However, what if another petition next year is something that you would gladly give your life for? How will our rights get returned to us then?

Once a freedom is given up, it is gone! Rarely, if ever, is it returned. I beseech you all on both sides of the aisle, to think long and hard before you surrender your rights and those of the people who voted for you to begin with in our local, state, or federal governments. Freedom has been paid for with the price of blood, throughout our history. Our veterans' number one pursuit and motivation throughout centuries has been to protect our rights and our freedom. Most importantly our freedom to exercise our right to be heard and to have our citizens vote upon, for or against the changes in our society. How can something so valuable possibly be considered by those of you here today to be so worthy of dismissal.

I thank you for providing me this opportunity to speak my voice, I certainly hope that tomorrow you don't rethink that as the next way to silence the public, or will it be? Benjamin Franklin once wrote: "They who can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety". I hope you feel the same way.

Thank you