



Office of State Representative Stephanie Howse  
House District II

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STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE  
Wednesday, June 13, 2018  
Sponsor Testimony of HB 653 – Participatory Budgeting

Good Morning Chair Anielski, Vice Chair Hambley, Ranking Member Holmes and members of the State and Local Government Committee. I want to thank you for allowing me to give sponsor testimony on House Bill 653 (HB 653) – Participatory Budgeting. Participating Budgeting as defined by the Participatory Budgeting Project is a different way to manage public money, and to engage people in government. It is a democratic process in which community members directly decide how to spend part of a public budget. It enables taxpayers to work with government to make the budget decisions that affect their lives.

HB 653 proposes that each Ohio house district is allocated one million dollars per fiscal year for participatory budgeting. The county board of commissioners will establish a county participatory budgeting commission to oversee the participatory budgeting process, which will consist of the submission process for public ideas, hosting public community meetings and discussions and the selection of public proposals to be considered by voters. The types of proposals to consider for the participatory budgeting are construction, acquisition, or improvement of public works, public buildings, or other improvements benefiting the county.

I first learned about participatory budgeting a couple of years ago through listening to a radio program discuss ways on increasing civic engagement. In doing research, I discovered that there were 7 states (Massachusetts, New York, Illinois, North Carolina, Connecticut, California, Washington) where participatory budgeting ranging from \$50,000 - \$33 million by government bodies was taking place in cities within the United States.

Looking through the types of projects and processes communities have taken to create opportunities for people to directly decide how their tax dollars will be spent brought a sense of excitement to me that I wanted to share with you, my colleagues in the Ohio House. Most of our citizens have lost faith in our government and our ability to lead as elected officials. Participatory budgeting is a pathway to reconnect our people with their government and restore a belief that elected officials are truly public servants.



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A report by Public Agenda titled “Why Let The People Decide? Elected Officials on Participatory Budgeting” identified five findings about public officials regarding participatory budgeting:

1. *Officials who implemented PB typically saw it as a chance to get more constituents excited about local politics and to educate them about how government works. Most also said they expected PB to increase their popularity with constituents.*
2. *Most officials felt their PB processes had succeeded in generating enthusiasm and getting constituents more engaged in political life. Many also noted their PB processes raised constituents’ awareness of government inefficiencies, for better or for worse. Generally, officials said PB helped them understand constituents’ needs better.*
3. *The need for adequate time, money and staff to implement PB was a challenge cited by most officials who had adopted it. Several discussed the challenges of ensuring their processes were not dominated by the most advantaged groups in their jurisdictions. Explaining the process effectively and responding to residents’ criticisms and concerns were also common themes.*
4. *Officials who had not adopted PB often saw themselves as already sufficiently attuned to constituents’ needs. They often worried about resources for implementation if they did decide to adopt it. Several said the budgets typically allocated to PB were too small for projects to have much impact.*
5. *Securing more resources for implementation is important for PB’s future, most officials who had adopted the process agreed. At the same time, some suggested ways to make implementation more efficient. Several also suggested PB must expand beyond capital budgets, and that the budgets allocated to it should be larger if PB is to affect communities and government meaningfully over the long term.*

The state of Ohio has the chance to be a model for the country on how to partner with local communities to give the public direct control on how their tax dollars will be spent. If HB 653 is adopted, we will be the first state to implement participatory budgeting. Cities have shown that participatory budgeting can be successfully implemented, now is the time to expand PBs reach on a statewide level.

I thank you all for your time and I will be happy to take committee members’ questions after a quick introductory video on Participatory Budgeting. <https://vimeo.com/162743651>