



**State Representative Derek Merrin  
District 47**

**House Bill 342 – Sponsor Testimony  
Ways & Means Committee  
November 28, 2018**

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Chairman Eklund, Vice-Chairman Terhar, Ranking Member Williams, and members of the Ways & Means Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on House Bill 342. The bill's premise is ballot language for levies and bond issues should be clear and understandable. Voters should not have to utilize a calculator in the voting booth to decipher the fiscal impact of a levy or bond. The legislation updates antiquated ballot language by having millage expressed in terms of \$100,000 market value rather in terms of \$100 taxable value.

Beginning in 1939, the Ohio Revised Code required millage be expressed with a dollar amount in relation to \$100 of property valuation. This is necessary because the mills system is complicated. For example, most voters do not know what 4.5 mills, 6 mills, or 9.9 mills levy means. However, values of homes have changed, but the law has not changed to reflect modern day home values. To compound the problem, \$100 taxable value is actually \$287 market value due to property being tax at 35%. This is unknown to most voters, thus making it very difficult to determine the fiscal impact to their own property.

It is standard practice by media outlets, local governments, and political advertisements to express levies in relation to \$100,000 market value. House Bill 342 updates the law to reflect this standard, common-sense practice. During my time researching this issue, I have uncovered additional problems with ballot language. One quick example would be the amount of money a levy will generate annually is missing in ballot language for most levies. This is an unexplainable omission and a disservice to voters. It is my goal to address this issue and others soon.

At this time, I am hopeful the legislature will approve House Bill 342 that seeks to provide clear, accurate, and relevant information to voters. I hope the committee agrees that House Bill 342 is a positive step toward achieving that goal. I have attached actual ballot language from November 2018 in Lucas County, which illustrates the current problem. It should be helpful in our dialogue here today. I welcome any questions committee members may have at this time.

**GENERAL ELECTION  
NOVEMBER 6, 2018  
LUCAS COUNTY, OHIO**

**Instructions to Voter**

- To vote: completely darken the oval (●) to the left of your choice.
- Note the permitted number of choices directly below the title of each candidate office. Do not mark the ballot for more choices than allowed.
- If you mark the ballot for more choices than permitted, that contest or question will not be counted.
- To vote for a write-in candidate: completely darken the oval (●) to the left of the blank line and write in the candidate's name. Only votes cast for candidates who filed as write-in candidates can be counted.
- Do not write in a candidate's name if that person's name already is printed on the ballot for that same contest.
- If you make a mistake or want to change your vote: return your ballot to an election official and get a new ballot. You may ask for a new ballot up to two times.

**Issue 1****To Reduce Penalties for Crimes of Obtaining, Possessing, and Using Illegal Drugs****Proposed Constitutional Amendment**

Proposed by Initiative Petition

To add a new Section 12 to Article XV of the Constitution of the State of Ohio

A majority yes vote is necessary for the amendment to pass.

If adopted, the amendment would:

- Require sentence reductions of incarcerated individuals, except individuals incarcerated for murder, rape, or child molestation, by up to 25% if the individual participates in rehabilitative, work, or educational programming.
- Mandate that criminal offenses of obtaining, possessing, or using any drug such as fentanyl, heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine, LSD, and other controlled substances cannot be classified as a felony, but only a misdemeanor.
- Prohibit jail time as a sentence for obtaining, possessing, or using such drugs until an individual's third offense within 24 months.
- Allow an individual convicted of obtaining, possessing, or using any such drug prior to the effective date of the amendment to ask a court to reduce the conviction to a misdemeanor, regardless of whether the individual has completed the sentence.
- Require any available funding, based on projected savings, to be applied to state-administered rehabilitation programs and crime victim funds.
- Require a graduated series of responses, such as community service, drug treatment, or jail time, for minor, non-criminal probation violations.

**SHALL THE AMENDMENT BE APPROVED?** YES NO**Issue 3****PROPOSED TAX LEVY (ADDITIONAL)****WASHINGTON LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICT**

A majority affirmative vote is necessary for passage.

An additional tax for the benefit of the Washington Local School District, Lucas County, Ohio for the purpose of providing for current operating expenses at a rate not exceeding 3.9 mills, and general permanent improvements at a rate not exceeding 1 mill, to constitute a combined rate not exceeding 4.9 mills for each one dollar of valuation, which amounts to \$0.49 for each one hundred dollars of valuation, for a continuing period of time, commencing in 2018, first due in calendar year 2019.

 FOR THE TAX LEVY AGAINST THE TAX LEVY**Issue 9****PROPOSED TAX LEVY (RENEWAL)****COUNTY OF LUCAS**

A majority affirmative vote is necessary for passage.

A renewal of a tax for the benefit of the County of Lucas for the purpose of the support of children services and the care and placement of children at a rate not exceeding 1.85 mills for each one dollar of valuation, which amounts to \$0.185 for each one hundred dollars of valuation, for ten years, commencing in 2018, first due in calendar year 2019.

 FOR THE TAX LEVY AGAINST THE TAX LEVY**Issue 10****PROPOSED BOND ISSUE****COUNTY OF LUCAS**

A majority affirmative vote is necessary for passage.

Shall bonds be issued by the County of Lucas for the purpose of constructing, furnishing and equipping a new County jail and behavioral health assessment center and acquiring, clearing, improving and equipping the sites thereof in the principal amount of \$185,000,000, to be repaid annually over a maximum period of 37 years, and an annual levy of property taxes be made outside the ten-mill limitation, estimated by the county auditor to average over the repayment period of the bond issue 1.37 mills for each one dollar of tax valuation, which amounts to \$0.137 for each one hundred dollars of tax evaluation, commencing in 2018, first due in calendar year 2019, to pay the annual debt charges on the bonds and to pay debt charges on any notes issued in anticipation of those bonds?

 FOR THE BOND ISSUE AGAINST THE BOND ISSUE**Issue 11****PROPOSED TAX LEVY (RENEWAL)****COUNTY OF LUCAS**

A majority affirmative vote is necessary for passage.

A renewal of a tax for the benefit of the County of Lucas for the purpose of the operation of mental health programs and alcohol and drug addiction programs by the Mental Health and Recovery Services Board at a rate not exceeding 1 mill for each one dollar of valuation, which amounts to \$0.10 for each one hundred dollars of valuation, for ten years, commencing in 2018, first due in calendar year 2019.

 FOR THE TAX LEVY AGAINST THE TAX LEVY

