

TO: House Government Accountability & Oversight Committee  
FROM: Gary Daniels, Chief Lobbyist, ACLU of Ohio  
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RE: House Joint Resolution 19 – Opponent testimony



## Ohio

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To Chairman Blessing, Vice Chair Reineke, Ranking Member Clyde, and members of the House Government Accountability & Oversight Committee, thank you for this opportunity to present opponent testimony against House Joint Resolution 19 on behalf of the ACLU of Ohio.

Regardless of whether one supports HJR 19 or not, what is undeniable is this resolution deliberately seeks to significantly reduce democracy in Ohio by limiting, in several ways, the ability of Ohioans to have a direct role in the direction our state takes.

More specifically, HJR 19 does the following:

- 1) It requires a minimum 60% threshold of voters for a ballot initiative to be approved. Using Issue 1, the most recent initiative on Ohio's ballot, as an example, this means, for Issue 1 to pass, it would have needed 50% "yes" votes *plus* at least an additional 430,000 votes. To give you an idea how many people 430,000 is, it is about the same amount of all combined people (not just voters or adults) in Cincinnati and Dayton.
- 2) It limits how long petition signatures are valid before submission. The Ohio Constitution currently has no restriction, HJR 19 imposes a 180 day limit from when the petition is signed.
- 3) It requires petitions for ballot initiatives to be submitted by April 1 in order to have it on the November ballot of that same year. Currently, those petitions must be submitted at least 125 days (early August) before the November election.

So, campaigns will have four fewer months to collect signatures and those signatures will be invalid after six months. If the campaign can overcome those hurdles it must then, again using the most recent example, receive another approximately 430,000 votes over 50% of votes cast.

All because proponents of HJR 19 want Ohioans to have even *less* say or control over their state.

While passage and implementation of this resolution will keep issues off the ballot there are some who will certainly benefit. They are the ones with deep pockets, backed by corporations, big individual donors, and unidentified financial backers. They may and will continue to place issues on Ohio's ballot because they have the resources.

To read HJR 19, one would think Ohio has some sort of crisis or major defect with an out-of-control ballot initiative process. Yet, that is not the case. Very few issues qualify now for Ohio's ballot because the process already includes stringent requirements. Even fewer issues receive Ohioans' approval when they do appear on the ballot.

Everyone in this room can point to past ballot initiatives they liked and ones they did not. Ultimately, Ohioans decided the fate of each one. But now Big Government wants to put its finger on the scale to give their constituents less choice, less ability, less power because proponents believe they know best for Ohio.

House Joint Resolution 19 limits democracy - by design - to address a problem that does not exist. The ACLU of Ohio urges you to reject HJR 19 and preserve one of the precious few ways Ohioans have to directly impact their state.