

# WITNESS INFORMATION FORM

Please complete the Witness Information Form before testifying:

Date: 12/10/2018

Name: Melanie Majikas

Are you representing: Yourself  Organization

Organization (If Applicable): \_\_\_\_\_

Position/Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: 5850 Birdie Lane

City: Mentor State: OH Zip: 44060

Best Contact Telephone: 440-725-8032 Email: mmajikas@gmail.com

Do you wish to be added to the committee notice email distribution list? Yes  No

Business before the committee

Legislation (Bill/Resolution Number): HJR 19

Specific Issue: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you testifying as a: Proponent  Opponent  Interested Party

Will you have a written statement, visual aids, or other material to distribute? Yes  No

(If yes, please send an electronic version of the documents, if possible, to the Chair's office prior to committee. You may also submit hard copies to the Chair's staff prior to committee.)

How much time will your testimony require? written testimony only

Please provide a brief statement on your position:

HJR 19 is ill-advised legislation that diminishes citizen participation in the democratic process. The effects of this legislation would actually increase, not decrease, ballot initiatives funded by motivated external groups because citizen-led coalitions would not be able to effectively gather signatures with the restrictions in the bill. Only well-funded entities would be able to meet these requirements, eliminating the voice of everyday citizens in our state government.

*Please be advised that this form and any materials (written or otherwise) submitted or presented to this committee are records that may be requested by the public and may be published online.*

## WITNESS TESTIMONY SUBMITTED IN OPPOSITION TO HJR 19

MELANIE MAJIKAS

Honorable legislators,

In the summer and fall of 2017, I helped to coordinate efforts for the Fair Districts ballot initiative petition in Lake County. During those months, I worked with a small cadre of very dedicated volunteers—all of us unpaid—as we arranged shifts at our local libraries, community events, farmers' markets, meetings of area nonprofit groups, and any other appropriate location we could find to talk to voters about this important, nonpartisan initiative to reform gerrymandering in Ohio. Everywhere we went, we were met with enthusiasm from voters of all political persuasions, who saw the fundamental need for reform in our district drawing process in the state. We were successful in acquiring hundreds of signatures for this ballot initiative in the months we dedicated to this effort.

While it was rewarding and worthwhile work, ultimately laying the groundwork for what became the successful state Issue 1 on the May 2018 ballot, it was not easy work, by any stretch of the imagination. Identifying, locating, and arranging volunteer coverage for a wide array of locations in our county took time, energy, and passion for the cause. It is already difficult to acquire the required number of valid signatures both statewide and percentage wide in each county. We were fortunate to have voter enthusiasm, good weather, and most importantly, TIME on our side.

But HJR 19 seeks to undermine citizen-organized ballot initiatives like this one in the future. Without any real need to do so, HJR 19 would significantly impair the ability of citizens like myself to coordinate and organize the massive endeavor that a ballot initiative requires to be successful. Rather than eliminating ballot initiatives that are organized by well-funded sources from outside the state, this shortsighted legislation actually welcomes them in with open arms, while making it virtually impossible for volunteer-led initiatives to be successful. Shortening the amount of time that signatures will be valid, and requiring signatures to be collected during the coldest times of the year in a state not known for balmy winter weather, delivers a sure death blow to citizen-organized activism. This is not the desire of Ohio voters, and it's certainly not something the Legislature should be doing at such a rush in a lame duck session with significant input and debate.

HJR 19 subverts the will of the people to change their government in a way that is Constitutionally protected. The new requirements and timeline would strengthen deep-pocketed organizations and stifle organizations who rely on volunteers to get an issue on the ballot. In addition, the unprecedented turnout in the November 2018 election has already raised the threshold for the number of signatures needed for future ballot initiatives. The best way to protect the sanctity of the Ohio Constitution is to make the initiated statute process easier with a safe haven of 5 to 10 years.

Thank you for your time,  
Melanie Majikas