

Rev Joan VanBecelaere
Columbus, OH
December 6, 2022

Chair Wilkin, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Brown
and members of the Government Oversight Committee

I am Rev Joan VanBecelaere, a retired Unitarian Universalist
minister. I'm here to ask you to vote against passage of **House
Joint Resolution 6**.

I am truly puzzled about why some feel a need to make it more
difficult for Ohioans to have their voices hear in the governance
of this state.

We already have to gather hundreds of thousands of verified
signatures from around the state to put a citizen amendment on
the ballot. It is even necessary for the Ohio legislature to get a
supermajority before they can put a proposed amendment on
the ballot. This is already a difficult and demanding process that
protects us from frivolous or transitory measures.

But HJR 6 would make it almost impossible for anyone *except*
outside big money special interests to gather enough resources
to successfully pass a ballot initiative in our state. Talk about
rigging the process for the rich and powerful.

And because the current process is already demanding, we
have not experienced massive numbers of citizen initiatives in
the past. The very few that have passed were popular and
supported by the majority of Ohio citizens. This is the very
definition of citizen empowerment in a democracy.

The only reason I can see for this bill is fear that a majority of Ohioans might prefer or demand an amendment that some legislators might not favor. But fear of our citizens' democratic voice is a very poor reason to try to make it harder for Ohioans to place their initiatives on the ballot.

This is not a matter of liberal or conservative or a particular party policy or agenda. This is a matter of right and wrong. This is a matter of enabling all Ohio citizens to participate in a free and fair democracy. Voter engagement in our process through initiatives is a sacred act to be protected and promoted, not impeded and blocked.

I want to share a quote by the theologian Rev Dr Matthew Fox who wrote: "Democracy is a spiritual thing, a participatory effort requiring virtue, debate, intelligence, and modesty. Plutocracy (he notes) fits a superpower much more readily; it is far more efficient: government of the few, by the few, and for the few"

In this age of post-pandemic confusion when our public life is being challenged on so many different fronts, we must refrain from creating government of the few by making it harder for citizens to engage in our democratic process.

Please do not pass HJR 6.