

OHIO FAMILIES UNITE

FOR POLITICAL ACTION AND CHANGE

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

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Emily Cole, I use she/her pronouns, and I have the honor of serving as the Executive Director of Ohio Families Unite for Political Action and Change, or OFUPAC. The families I stand with and for often disproportionately bear the brunt of the legislative and policy decisions made in this space, given the oppressive expansion of hyper-partisan politics inherent in this general assembly. I am here today to stand for our families in strong opposition to House Joint Resolution 6.

House Joint Resolution 6 is a dishonest and bad-faith attempt at rigging our constitution to avoid actual accountability by our Secretary of State, through a representative seeking to make his mark on our constitution. You know this, I know this, everyone in this room knows this. And we all know that regardless of what any of us says, your minds are made up and this joint resolution will pass on party lines and move right along through this process.

Anyone who believes citizen-initiated constitutional amendments are easy likely has never been part of one. Language has to be so precise to pass the vetting process of the Attorney General's office that it frequently takes multiple rounds of initial signature-gathering. And *then*, once approved by the ballot board, a near Herculean effort is undertaken to gather the requisite signatures to make it to the statewide ballot in a general election. It takes incredible organization, significant financial resources, and an iron will and dedication to the matter at hand.

I know. I served as the Campaign Manager for a failed attempt at a citizen-initiated constitutional amendment in 2021. The irony in *this* resolution being shoved through lame duck to make it onto a special election ballot in May is not lost on me.

Our impacted families are very used to being disregarded in this space. They are perpetually viewed as a political tool by both parties, and not as *people*. Frankly, they don't much care for what either party in this state has had to offer them for quite awhile. The power of a constitutional amendment is among the top opportunities they have to recourse for criminal legal system reform. You yourselves, and your lack of interest in taking up reform efforts through bills beyond sponsor testimony, have made that clear. It's why we continue, even when our efforts fail, to attempt to put a statewide constitutional amendment on the ballot.

I'm testifying today not because I think you'll find your courage to stand up against extremists in the Republican party, but because families at home need to know that we see what is happening, and we will stand up, speak out, and organize to defeat any effort that attempts to silence the majority to benefit the minority.

OHIO FAMILIES UNITE

FOR POLITICAL ACTION AND CHANGE

When you put this on the special election ballot, we *will* turn out the voters you ignore and we *will* lead a strong, powerful, people-first opposition campaign. We did it before, chairing the statewide coalition opposing State Issue 1 this past November, and we will do it again. We've used every single opportunity you've presented to us through your oppressionist policymaking not just to fight back, but to *build*.

And while Secretary LaRose claimed a large margin of win on State Issues 1 and 2 in November, we know that those efforts were *projected* to win with 93% of the vote, *not* in the seventies. We did that, with no resources and with scrappy and dogged determination to build an Ohio that is fair for us *all* and free from a gerrymandered supermajority rigging each and every aspect of our political power spectrum to rule.

So while I urge you to vote no on House Joint Resolution 6, I also promise you this. The Ohio that will turn out to vote in May is not the Ohio you've been betting on. We've made sure of it.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Emily Cole
Executive Director
Ohio Families Unite for Political Action and Change
(703) 862-7322
ecole@ofupac.org