



**Opposition Testimony to House Joint Resolution 6**

**House Government Oversight Committee**

**Jen Miller, League of Women Voters of Ohio**

**December 7, 2022**

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

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. As the Executive Director of the League of Women Voters of Ohio (LWVO), I am here on behalf of our 4,000 dues-paying members, who live in every state Senate District and nearly all Ohio House Districts.

Ohio's long tradition of direct democracy has been enshrined in the Ohio Constitution since 1912. Government for and by the people is a value held sacred by Ohioans from Lake Erie to the Ohio River and from the Indiana to the Pennsylvania borders. Despite the claims of HJR6 supporters, the ballot initiative process is not easy nor is it overused. Successfully placing an initiative on the ballot requires hundreds of thousands of verified signatures in at least half of Ohio's 88 counties. Since 1950, only ten out of 44 ballot measures have passed (23%).

LWVO agrees that the Ohio Constitution is sacrosanct, which is why at least one representative attended every meeting hosted by the Ohio Constitutional Modernization Commission's Bill of Rights and Voting subcommittee and every hearing of the Constitutional Revision and Updating subcommittee as well as countless other hearings by the Modernization Commission. It is also why we have sometimes in the past opposed certain ballot initiatives, because we felt as though the policies should be passed as statutes - not Constitutional amendments. But HJR6 is not the answer.

As we testified several times during the Ohio Constitutional Modernization Commission, the best path forward to both protect the Ohio Constitution and preserve Ohio's long tradition of direct democracy would be to improve the process for citizen-based statutory initiative campaigns. We specifically asked for a reduction in required signatures, a reduced county geographic distribution requirement, and a safe haven, in which the General Assembly could not just immediately overturn a statute passed by voters with a simple majority. We also submitted testimony about the Constitutional Amendment process, recommending that it not

be made more difficult, but rather that the signature requirement be lowered and that the ballot board be required to adopt neutral and easily-comprehensible ballot language.

Not even after the extensive conversations through the Commission was a 60% passage threshold supported. In fact, the Constitutional Revision and Updating subcommittee supported a 55% passage rate paired with an easing of the statutory-initiative process, which is why I find this rushed powergrab particularly distressing. Any changes to a process that is over a century old should be thoroughly deliberated, not rushed through lame duck and then put before voters during an off-year primary, when low turnout is to be expected.

The League is honored to stand with 150 allied organizations who represent Ohio citizens from all walks of life in opposition to this threat to direct democracy. HJR6 will have the *opposite* of the desired effect claimed by its supporters. It will make it almost impossible for anyone *except* deep-pocketed groups to fund successful GOTV campaigns and extensive media buys that would now be required to have a ballot initiative passed at the higher approval rate.

Direct democracy is at the heart of Ohio's values, and citizens have been using ballot initiatives for over a century to act on issues of grave importance that elected officials have otherwise ignored. We ask you to stand with the people of Ohio by rejecting HJR6.

I am happy to answer any questions. Please feel free to contact me to discuss further at [director@lwvohio.org](mailto:director@lwvohio.org) or 614-469-1505. Thank you.

*The League of Women Voters of Ohio was formed in May 1920 out of Ohio's woman suffrage movement. The League is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. The League has over 4000 members and 34 local Leagues across the Buckeye State.*