

## Written Testimony in Opposition to HJR 6 William Lyons, Columbus, OH

Chairman Wilkins, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Brown, and members of the committee, I am writing in opposition to House Joint Resolution 6.

The Ohio Constitution, Article 1, Section 2 states that, "*All political power is inherent in the people. Government is instituted for their equal protection and benefit, and they have the right to alter, reform, or abolish the same, whenever they may deem it necessary ...*" HJR 6 is an attack on this important principle of direct democracy.

The peoples' right of initiative has been enshrined in our state constitution since 1912 which granted Ohio citizens the right to act as co-legislators, as a check and balance when the legislature is not acting in Ohioan's best interests. After all, isn't our government supposed to be of, by, and for the people?

Initiative is already an onerous process that requires tremendous cooperation and effort. I personally have been involved in several initiatives and know first-hand the hard work having worked over one thousand hours collecting several thousand signatures, without pay. Many volunteers like me have done the same because they believe in direct democracy and have worked on an issue that they feel will benefit the people in their community or their state. Currently, for an Ohio constitutional amendment, 431,809 valid signatures are required and the bar most probably just became higher because of the turnout in the recent November gubernatorial election.

Supposedly, one justification for this is to protect the Ohio constitution from outside groups and big-money special interests. I find this hypocritical because many of the laws proposed and enacted by this legislature come from outside big-money corporate interests like ALEC and oil and gas lobbying groups. In addition, many legislators have received significant amounts of money from special interest group - many outside of the state. Legislators trust the people to elect them with a 50% plus one margin, but supporters of this bill must not trust the people to be smart enough to pass the "correct" constitutional amendments with this standard, except, of course, if this proposal makes it to the ballot.

Moreover, the main justification for this proposal seems to conflate true grassroots Ohio citizen groups working to improve our state with special interest groups selfishly seeking to achieve their own ends. This attitude is disdainful towards the citizen activists of Ohio. Democracy works best when citizens are actively participating.

The timing of this resolution is suspect because no recent, specific examples are mentioned citing a problem with our system as it is. Also, this proposal is not coming from the people of Ohio clamoring to change our constitution because they feel this change is needed. The current process is working just fine. Only a small percentage of

initiated constitutional amendments are successful. Since 2000 less than 30%, or only 5 out of 17, have passed.

Think of it, if 59% of Ohioans voted for a state constitutional amendment, the amendment would not pass under this proposal. This would be a mockery of democracy and would mean that we are governed by the minority.

One thing you can be sure of if this proposal makes it to the ballot is that I, and many citizens and organizations throughout Ohio will fight this measure with all our means. So, I ask that you let this measure die its rightful death.

Thank you.  
Bill Lyons