



The OEA will lead the way for continuous improvement of public education while advocating for members and the learners they serve.

House Joint Resolution 1: Opposition Testimony
House Constitutional Resolutions Committee
Wednesday, April 19, 2023

Chair Plummer, Vice Chair Hillyer, Ranking Member Mohamed, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Jeff Wensing. I currently serve as the Vice President of the Ohio Education Association. On behalf of the 120,000 members of OEA, thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to House Joint Resolution 1 (SJR 1).

Majority rule is a basic principle of our democracy. However, HJR 1 seeks to weaken the voice of Ohio voters by making it much more difficult to pass amendments to the Constitution, including citizen-led initiatives—by requiring 60% of the vote rather than a simple majority to amend the Constitution.

HJR 1 would also make the arduous process of bringing a citizen-led initiative to the ballot even more difficult. HJR 1 would require gathering signatures of at least 5% of electors in every county instead of from 44 counties. The amendment would also eliminate the ten-day cure period to gather additional signatures.

For over 100 years, Ohioans have had the ability to amend the Constitution through a citizen-led initiative. Utilizing direct democracy in this manner is a tool for Ohio voters to address important issues when the legislature is either unable or unwilling to do so.

The existing process is far from easy; requiring hundreds of thousands of signatures from across the state to qualify for the ballot. Furthermore, there is already a prohibition from special interests using the Constitution to create a monopoly, business interest, or preferred tax status. Raising the threshold for passing an amendment aims to make it harder for the citizens to have an effective voice and address issues that benefit the public interest.

In December, the over 600 delegates to the OEA Representative Assembly passed a new business item in opposition to this proposed change. OEA is among a large, diverse, and growing list of organizations who have expressed opposition to this proposal.

Further, I would like to voice OEA's opposition to a proposal to add an August special election for the purpose of rushing this to the ballot. Last General Assembly saw the legislature enact legislation to eliminate August elections in most cases. The argument from supporters to eliminate the August special election last General Assembly was that these elections have low voter turnout, and it was improper to have decisions made in that manner. Now, there seems to be a stunning reversal and a desire to hold an August election where the outcome could be a lasting alteration to the rights of all Ohioans.

I urge members of this committee to vote no on HJR 1. The voters of Ohio should be our ultimate decision makers, and when the majority speaks at the ballot box, our elected officials need to listen.

Thank you for your time and attention. I am happy to respond to questions.

