



Opposition Testimony to House Joint Resolution 1
Ohio House Constitutional Resolutions Committee
Catherine Turcer, Common Cause Ohio
April 19, 2023

Chair Plummer, Vice Chair Hillyer, Ranking Member Mohamed, and esteemed members of the Constitutional Resolutions Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. I am the executive director of Common Cause Ohio and we are committed to open and accountable government that serves the public interest. That's why we have worked so hard over the years to establish fair rules for creating voting districts and why we and many others have turned toward citizen initiatives when the state legislature failed to act.

Since 1912, Ohioans from across the political spectrum have utilized the right to amend our Constitution via the petition process. Direct democracy gives voters the ability to make a real impact and has helped engage Ohioans in the political process. There is no justifiable reason, after over 100 years, to make this already challenging process even harder.

[Citizen initiatives are not overused](#). There hasn't been a citizen initiated ballot measure before voters since 2018. The last successful citizen-led ballot measure focused on victims' rights and was on the ballot in 2017. Over the past 10 years, there were only four elections with ballot measures through signature collection. In the past 50 years, there were 28 years without a citizen initiative on the ballot. Of those elections that had a ballot measure, only a handful of the elections had more than one issue for voters to consider.

This is in part due to how difficult it is for Ohioans to collect enough signatures and place a proposal on the ballot for voters to consider. I am a strong proponent of direct democracy and I have been involved in citizen initiatives to place redistricting reform on the ballot. I was the chair of Voters First an effort in 2012 and the chair of Fair Districts = Fair Elections in 2017.

House Joint Resolution 1 moves the bar for county requirements– 5% of the gubernatorial voter– from 44 to 88 counties. The current requirement is adequate to ensure that there is support for measures from all over the state. All 88 counties would be a true obstacle for citizen groups.

The elimination of the “cure period” in HJR 1 is simply unreasonable. Ballot campaigns do their best to validate the signatures but it’s extremely challenging. The Board of Elections work in bipartisan pairs to confirm signatures and there can be a miss match. Removing these additional days to collect adequate signatures can only be viewed as an attempt to eliminate a right that Ohioans have had for more than 100 years.

Ohio voters are cautious about amending the Ohio Constitution. In the past 20 years, voters approved only 36% of citizen-led ballot measures. The last time that more than one citizen-initiated change to the Ohio Constitution was approved at the same time was in 1992.

There are already protections in place to address concerns about monopolies, [the Ohio Initiated Monopolies Amendment of 2015](#). These changes to the Ohio Constitution were passed by Ohio voters to address concerns about wealthy interests abusing the process.

Requiring a 60% supermajority to pass ballot measures breaks the intention and balance of the Ohio Constitution. This higher threshold thwarts the tradition of majority rule and will likely have the *opposite* of the sponsor’s desired effect: it will make it almost impossible for anyone *except* big money special interests to pass ballot measures in Ohio successfully.

I urge you to oppose House Joint Resolution 1. Thank you for this opportunity to share my concerns with you.