

Ohio House Constitutional Resolutions Committee
Testimony of Michael F. Curtin
House Joint Resolution 1
135th Ohio General Assembly
April 19, 2023

Chairman Plummer, Vice Chairman Hillyer, Ranking Member Mohamed, Minority Leader Russo, members of the House Constitutional Resolutions Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on House Joint Resolution 1.

I'm Mike Curtin, a life-long resident of central Ohio and retired newspaperman. I worked for 38 years for The Columbus Dispatch (1973-2011) – a career devoted mostly to researching, analyzing, and reporting on local and state government, the evolution of public policy in our state, and the history of electoral politics in Ohio. Along the way, I authored the first two editions of The Ohio Politics Almanac and co-authored the third edition.

After my retirement from The Dispatch, I served two terms (2013 through 2016) in this House, representing neighborhoods on the West and South sides of Columbus. During those four years, I served on the Ohio Constitutional Modernization Commission.

Since then, I've continued my study of Ohio's government and politics, especially issues related to the Ohio Constitution. I've continued to write about them, attempting whenever possible to put these issues in historical context.

I come before you today because I believe we have a collective and solemn responsibility to pursue best practices in government. Best practices in government must begin with best practices in elections. In government, nothing is more important than honest, fair, and trustworthy elections. Over many decades, Ohio has earned a solid record.

Ohio's record of fair and trustworthy elections – putting voters first – now is at risk. Never before – not in 220 years of statehood – has the Ohio General Assembly done what is now being contemplated.

Not one of our previous 134 general assemblies has scheduled a special election for a single, proposed constitutional amendment – much less one with the seismic consequences contemplated in House Joint Resolution 1.

Throughout our history, the Ohio General Assembly has demonstrated the good judgment, the good grace, the good faith of scheduling constitutional amendment proposals for regular elections – most often November general elections.

Your predecessors in all previous general assemblies have followed this best practice to ensure the broadest possible consensus on the fundamental issues of statehood, especially the most fundamental of all – our constitutional rights.

Just a few months ago, Secretary LaRose and solid majorities of this House supported the elimination of August elections in all cases except for fiscal emergencies at the local level. The stated reasons for eliminating August elections were dismal turnouts, and the consequent empowerment of special interests, and the wasteful expenditure of tens of millions of dollars.

To reinstate an August election now for this proposed amendment would represent an absolute worst practice – a historically unprecedented worst practice – of governance and elections in Ohio. We would be turning our backs on two centuries of tradition.

As for the 60% threshold for amendments to win passage, this is a proposed solution to a nonexistent problem. In Ohio today, it is nearly impossible for anyone – so-called special interest or not – to successfully use the constitutional initiative to secure a special benefit.

That's because, in November 2015, Ohio voters wisely approved an anti-special interest amendment that forbids the initiative from being used to create a special benefit.

In the 8 years since its enactment, not one special interest has appeared on Ohio's doorstep seeking to propose such an amendment. Ohio voters closed and locked that door.

When asked what special interests they are trying to stop, the proponents of the amendment have cited only special interests of the past, such as casinos and marijuana peddlers. The casinos won in 2009. The marijuana peddlers lost in 2015. The sponsors have not cited one special interest of the current day they are trying to stop with their proposed amendment. That's because there are none. Ohioans put a stop to them in 2015.

Thank you. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.