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House Constitutional Resolutions Committee  
House Joint Resolution 1  
Opposition Testimony  
April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2023

Chairman Plummer, vice-chair Hillyer, ranking member Mohamed, and members of the House Constitutional Resolutions Committee, thank you for allowing me to present opposition testimony today. My name is Tim Burga, and I am President of the Ohio AFL-CIO. On behalf of over one million union members and retirees who are part of the state labor federation, we strongly oppose House Joint Resolution 1, which would change Ohio's long-standing constitutional amendment process from 50% + 1 passage to a super majority of 60%. We also oppose House Bill 144, which calls for a special election to place this resolution before voters on August 8<sup>th</sup>. Ohio's legislature should reject such extreme measures as an expensive, brazen political attempt to gain an electoral advantage, one that is sure to backfire.

For over 110 years, Ohioans have had the right to put Constitutional Amendments directly on the ballot for voter approval with a simple majority. This is the fair and democratic way, and over the years our federation's governing body has supported some of these ballot issues and we have opposed some. Whether we support or oppose a ballot measure is beside the point, as we strongly believe in Ohioans' rights to advance electoral issues and seek voter approval through direct simple majority democracy as permitted since 1912.

Unions in this state are working in bi-partisan fashion at all levels of government to support policies that are spurring massive job creation and economic development. With remarkable opportunities to move Ohio forward within our grasp, including huge job announcements in infrastructure, new energy and manufacturing, why risk the current atmosphere of cooperation with such an unnecessary, divisive policy like HJR 1? We can say with confidence that working Ohioans, especially trade unionists, are calling for more collaboration and less conflict.

As a true grassroots organization with permanent structure in place to move ballot initiatives, we can attest that it is no easy task. Following the cumbersome statutory process, collecting hundreds of thousands of valid signatures while meeting certain thresholds in 44 counties is challenging for even the best campaign with both a robust volunteer and paid signature gathering effort. Making petitioners hit those same signature thresholds in all 88 counties creates a barrier to the ballot that will almost certainly be unachievable. In addition, once an issue makes it on to the ballot, the campaign to obtain a majority "Yes" vote is very difficult as the success rate is just over one in four.

Furthermore, HJR 1 will not actually remedy the concern that the sponsors say they are fixing – keeping out-of-state special interests from using this process to shoehorn themselves into our

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constitution. This resolution does nothing to keep that from happening, and in fact favors well-funded special interests who can afford to chance obtaining a 60% vote threshold. HJR 1 will make it almost impossible for anyone except big-monied interests to successfully get to the ballot and pass a ballot initiative in Ohio.

This undemocratic, unprecedented political maneuver becomes even more egregious when you pair it with HB 144. Calling for this amendment to be placed on an August special election ballot, just a few months after prohibiting them in most cases, reaches a level of legislative hypocrisy not seen in this state in recent memory. As House Bill 458, to prohibit August special elections, successfully moved through the process last session, many legislators pointed out on social media, in press releases, and in floor speeches, that these elections are a waste of time and taxpayer money. During the debate, Secretary of State LaRose rightly pointed out, "Those embarrassingly low voter turnout rates in the last two August elections are not an anomaly. Voters just don't turn out." Issues, especially one of this magnitude, should not be decided by an extreme minority of the electorate.

As Ohio's labor federation, representing hundreds of thousands of working men and women who make our state go and keep us safe every day, we stand united in opposition to House Joint Resolution 1 and House Bill 144, and urge the Committee to reject these undemocratic, divisive proposals. We urge all members of the General Assembly to instead focus on the good momentum we have on job creation and economic development and advance policies that bring us together and improve the lives of all Ohioans.

Mr. Chairman, members of the House Constitutional Resolutions Committee, what Ohio needs right now is calm, not chaos. You can do your part by voting no on these divisive measures. Thank you for your time and I'm willing to take any questions you may have.