



# Pro-Choice Ohio

Good afternoon, Chairman Plummer, Vice Chair Hillyer, Ranking Member Mohamed, and members of the House Constitutional Resolutions Committee. My name is Gabriel Mann. I am the Communications Director for Pro-Choice Ohio, a statewide organization that advocates for abortion rights and reproductive freedom for all Ohioans. I am here to testify today on behalf of our staff, volunteers, and supporters across Ohio in opposition to House Joint Resolution 1.

In any functional, healthy democracy the voices of the people must be heard. Unfortunately, in Ohio these voices are getting harder and harder to hear through the noise of our rigged political process. In 2018, voters overwhelmingly passed legislative redistricting reform. The will of the majority of Ohioans was disregarded as this legislature passed unconstitutionally gerrymandered maps yet again. Time and again, this legislature shows that maintaining their own political power is more important than doing their job, which is to represent the people of our state.

Just as it did in the redistricting process, dismantling the ballot initiative process once again consolidates power among politicians and silences the voices of Ohioans. Ballot initiatives are the only remaining way for Ohioans to show this legislature what we want our state to be. With HJR 1, the legislature is once again changing the rules to rig the system by allowing a small minority of Ohioans to block initiatives that the majority want enacted.

This shredding of our constitution impacts so many issues that Ohioans care about. A living wage, gerrymandering, abortion rights, and many more. So many issues that the majority of Ohioans support, but are not supported by our rigged legislature. Despite polls continuously showing that the majority of Ohioans believe that an individual should have the right to access abortion, this legislature has enacted more than 30 restrictions on abortion care since 2011. We saw the impact of those attacks last year when immediately after the *Dobbs* decision was released. The 6-week abortion ban was allowed to go into effect, and for nearly three months while this ban was in place, Ohioans suffered the harms inflicted by this legislature.

People across this state were forced to travel or continue a pregnancy against their will. Some risked their health to travel. Others faced the daunting cost to take multiple days off work and travel across state lines for healthcare. Black, Brown, Latine, Indigenous, and other Ohioans of color, young Ohioans, Ohioans with disabilities, Ohioans living in poverty, Ohioans living in rural areas, and LGBTQ+ Ohioans are disproportionately impacted by harmful abortion bans and so many other policies passed by this legislature.

A rushed legislative process for considering this amendment combined with an attempt to put this to the voters in an August special election instead of the November general election shows just how far politicians in Ohio will go to consolidate and protect their power. Just a few months ago this legislative body eliminated August elections, Secretary of State Frank LaRose

said himself in testimony to the legislature that “These unnecessary ‘off-cycle’ elections aren’t good for taxpayers, election officials or the civic health of our state. It’s time for them to go.”

Voters across our state must have access to the ballot to pass initiatives that help our communities, that make Ohio a state where all can thrive, not just merely survive. Limiting access to the ballot is unpopular and unnecessary.

I strongly urge a NO vote on Substitute HJR 1.