



**Constitutional Resolutions Committee
April 19, 2023
Opponent Testimony – H. J. R. 1
Ilene Shapiro, Summit County Executive**

Chair Plummer, Vice Chair Hillyer, Ranking Member Mohamed and members of the Constitutional Resolutions Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in opposition to House Joint Resolution 1.

Like each of you, I was elected to serve my constituents. In our democratic republic, our citizens entrust elected representatives like you and me with power in an understanding we will wield power in the best interest of those we serve. Yet, like the ancient Grecians centuries ago, this power is also wielded by the people in certain instances through direct democracy. For example, at the local level, citizens exercise direct democracy when they weigh support for levies of all kinds—schools, sales taxes, public safety and more. Each year, these important and consequential decisions are made by a simple majority. We recognize and respect the ability of voters to make informed decisions about the questions that will have a great effect on their lives and livelihood.

The power of direct democracy is also available to Ohioans through our state constitutional amendment process. Long ago, our predecessors recognized the right of voters to exercise the power they typically delegate to their elected representatives through the citizen-initiated constitutional amendment process. Throughout our state’s history, voters have had the ability to amend our constitution, with a simple majority. We have seen citizen-initiated amendments pass and we have seen citizen-initiated amendments fail. It is concerning to now see state lawmakers are attempting to limit the power of voters, the very same voters who give you, the lawmakers, the right to sit here today, by creating a supermajority threshold for constitutional amendments at the ballot box. This threshold is an undemocratic attempt to weaken the ability of voters to amend the state constitution. I have heard concerns about so-called “special interest groups” using our current constitutional amendment process as a means of imposing their will on our state. These concerns are unfounded. For a constitutional amendment to pass at the ballot box, millions of Ohio voters must unite behind the issue at question. Do we really believe so many Ohio voters could be so easily tricked by these “outsiders” as they have been portrayed? Ohio voters, our constituents, deserve more credit than that.

I am further concerned about plans to use an August special election for H. J. R. 1. or S. J. R. 2. Mere months ago, the Ohio General Assembly voted to eliminate August special elections except when they are absolutely necessary. This change was overwhelmingly supported because we know August elections are costly and ineffective. In Summit County, an August election costs nearly \$1 million. In August 2022, use of these funds for an election resulted in 6.8% voter turnout. It is clear there is a disconnect between voters and special elections. They are also a burden for the everyday people we ask to staff them. It is challenging to staff our standard primary and general elections with Precinct Election Officials and it is even more challenging to staff an August special election. Such an important question should not be presented in this manner.

We the People, not We the Supermajority, is the belief this nation was founded on. Special interest groups do not vote, the citizens of Ohio vote. We must trust voters to make informed decisions at the ballot box and to exercise their direct democratic power. I hope you will show the voters of Ohio you trust them by opposing this undemocratic bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ilene Shapiro". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ilene Shapiro, Executive
County of Summit