

Opposition Testimony to Substitute Senate Joint Resolution 2
Bailey Culp
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Chairman Plummer, Vice Chair Hillyer, Ranking Member Mohamed, and members of the Constitutional Resolutions Committee:

I am writing to urge members of this committee to oppose SJR 2. Making it so that Ohioans have less power to have a say in the way that their government functions is a dangerous and irresponsible step for the general assembly to take. Citizens have had this right available to them for over a century now and the Ohio Constitution has held up fine, despite what some proponents of this legislation have suggested. This bill also makes it increasingly difficult for signature collection efforts to take place in a timely manner, and with massive costs to the citizens involved in those efforts. There are a few key reasons that I, and many others, oppose this bill that are important to note.

Costly

Having an August special election where millions of taxpayer dollars will be spent in order to have this issue raised is fiscally irresponsible and inappropriate. As local elections officials have noted in the past and are now pointing out now, carrying out a statewide election regardless of the issues that may be on the ballot is difficult. It requires months of planning and coordination in order for the election to run smoothly and that's not taking into account all of the routine things that could go sideways during the process. Ohio has already spent millions on non-November or May elections in the last few years and recently, this very body voted to do away with those in August aside from just a handful of cases. If this body recognized just months ago that August elections were costly and that the May or November elections would work just fine for the vast majority of non-emergency issues, it makes absolutely no sense to carry out an election in August of this year.

Undemocratic

Making it so that only 40% of Ohioans in any given election can overrule the wishes of the majority of citizens is undemocratic, and it does away with over a century of principle in this state. Trying to rush to the ballot to preempt future initiatives that this body may disagree with is not only inappropriate, but it's unfair. If enough Ohioans support an issue so much that they are willing to sign petitions for an amendment to be placed on the ballot, go out and get enough people to show up the vote come election day, and convince over half of the electorate to vote in favor of their issue: that is democracy at work. It makes little sense for the legislature to take it upon itself to limit the power that citizens have to make these decisions for themselves.

Unnecessary

Since a little over a century ago, just less than 70 citizen-led constitutional amendment initiatives have faced the voters and of those, only 26% have passed. It is extremely rare for voters to take it upon themselves to pursue this process and it is even more rare for enough voters to support the ballot issue. Supporters of this effort cite other states as being examples that Ohio should follow; one that I've heard is Florida. In the state of Florida, there is a 60% threshold in place for their citizen-led amendment process. Since 2010, Ohio has seen 16 proposals placed on the ballot (11 of those being from the legislature) while Florida has seen 46. There is no evidence to suggest that Ohioans are exceeding an appropriate amount of use from this power and if anything, there is no evidence to suggest that increasing the threshold will reduce use altogether.

This effort by the legislature to limit Ohioans' right to make an impact on their government is short-sighted, politically inappropriate, and irresponsible. This process has been available to us for over 100 years and has been used to support conservative issues, liberal issues, and everything in between. Getting rid of that power is wrong regardless of party or political ideology, and it places a greater importance on politicians than it does the people of this state. For all of those reasons, I urge members to vote in opposition to this resolution.