



Chair Plummer, Vice Chair Hillyer, Ranking Member Mohamed, and members of the House Constitutional Resolutions Committee,

My name is Mark Gavin, Sr., and I reside in Grove City, OH. I am proud to serve as the Director of Outreach & Senior Strategist for the Black Environmental Leaders Association (BEL) and Black Environmental Leaders Action Fund. On behalf of BEL and the communities we represent, I am here to express our firm opposition to the moderne 3/5th compromise, Senate Joint Resolution 2 (SJR 2). This proposal, which would require signatures from all 88 counties in Ohio to even place a measure before voters and a 60% majority vote to pass constitutional amendments, undermines the democratic rights of Ohioans, disproportionately affects marginalized communities, and overlooks the importance of equity in the political process.

It is disheartening and appalling that we find ourselves here discussing a proposal that mirrors the historic denial of political power Black individuals have continued to face since the inception of this country. SJR 2 would suppress the voices of the very people we should be empowering, especially marginalized communities that have long been excluded from the political process. I've been Black in Ohio all of my life so it came as no shock to hear a defense of slavery not long ago in this committee from companion bill sponsor Rep Stewart. It's not surprising that a debate on voting rights turned into a debate about incarceration and chattel.

It's also amazing that an effort to keep "outside special interest money" out of Ohio is being bankrolled by Richard Uihlein, the Illnios billionaire with deep pockets and an even deeper desire to meddle in Ohio's affairs. He could use his wealth to improve lives, but instead, he's pouring money into a campaign to undermine democracy and supporting controversial figures like predator Roy Moore. I assume we're supposed to pay no attention to the man behind the curtain.

Moreover, the special August election is just dripping with hypocrisy. Many of you in this chamber and even in this room supported getting rid of August elections just four months ago, but now that it fits your needs, you're bringing one more back. Time and time again, this body has bent the rules to spite Ohioans. Why not hold this election in November when more voters can participate? Oh, that's right, because it's easier to manipulate the outcome when fewer people show up. Nothing says democracy like a well-timed August election! The estimated \$20 million it will cost for this special election



could be better spent on feeding hungry Ohioans, fighting the opioid crisis, or addressing environmental issues in our communities.

Now, let's address Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose's involvement. He's got a record of voting in favor of gerrymandered legislative maps, supporting photo ID, and purging voter rolls. And now he's got his sights set on finding new ways to suppress Ohio's voters, even threatening legislators with consequences. It's as if he's collecting voter suppression badges like a dedicated Boy Scout.

The expedited process surrounding SJR 2 is a cause for concern, as it stifles meaningful debate and public input. We're talking about the future of our democracy, and yet we're rushing through the process as if we were late for dinner. The citizens of Ohio deserve better.

In conclusion, the Black Environmental Leaders Association strongly opposes SJR 2. This proposal serves only to further marginalize communities already struggling to have their voices heard in the political process. We urge the members of the House Constitutional Resolutions Committee to reject SJR 2 and instead focus on fostering a more inclusive and equitable democracy in Ohio. Thank you for your time and consideration.