

Testimony on Senate Bill 92 and House Bill 144
House Government Oversight Committee

Submitted by:
Deborah Cooper

Chair Peterson, Vice Chair Thomas, Ranking Member Forhan, and members of the committee:

Thank you for allowing me to present this testimony in opposition to SB 92 and HB 144.

I am a long-time Ohio resident and regular voter. I also volunteered to collect and verify signatures for the ballot initiative to end gerrymandering several years ago. It was a long and difficult process requiring many volunteer hours over a number of months, which is why such initiatives are seldom brought and seldom successful. Nevertheless, the majority on the Ohio Redistricting Commission chose to ignore the 71 percent of Ohioans who voted for the anti-gerrymandering initiative, making an end-run around Ohio's constitution and defying the Ohio Supreme Court. Once again, the supermajority in the legislature is doing its best to silence Ohio voters.

Last year, the legislature decided to end August special elections through a bill sponsored by Rep. Thomas Hall, who cited the cost (an estimated \$20 million) and low voter turnout. Just months later, SB 92 bill sponsors, Sen. McColley and Sen. Gavarone, reversed course, specifically for a legislative ballot initiative that would raise the threshold for passage of citizen initiatives to 60 percent. Why? Because citizens are planning to put an initiative on the ballot this November. (Of course, citizen initiatives can *only* go on the ballot in November, and not during a primary election or a special election. Legislative initiatives are not restricted in this way.)

It would be relatively inexpensive to add one more question to the November ballot about raising the threshold for passage of citizen initiatives, but in this about-face, the intent is clear: sponsors and proponents of SB 92 / HR 144 want to disrupt the citizen-led initiative currently underway to restore reproductive rights. The calculus is that low turnout in an August special election will increase chances for passage of HJR 1 / SJR 2, which, if passed, would likely squash the citizen initiative to be considered in November.

Specifically making the connection between the proposed reproductive rights amendment and the resurrection of an August special election, Sen. Pres. Matt Huffman said, "If we save 30,000 lives as a result of spending \$20 million, I think that's a great thing."

The hypocrisy underlying SB 92 / HB 144 is stunning. It comes on the heels of recently enacted HB 458 (which included the elimination of August elections), a comprehensive voter suppression bill passed to address non-existent voter fraud.

SB 92/HB 144 is one more blatant attempt to silence Ohio voters and must not go forward.

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Resource: <https://ohiocapitaljournal.com/2023/03/24/ohio-senators-working-to-resurrect-recently-eliminated-august-elections-to-fight-abortion-amendment/>