



Opposition Testimony to Senate Bill 92
House Government Oversight Committee
Jen Miller, League of Women Voters of Ohio
April 27, 2023

Chair Peterson, Vice Chair Thomas, Ranking Member Forhan, esteemed members of the committee, and hard working legislative staff:

Thank you for allowing me to testify today in opposition to SB 92. As the Executive Director of the League of Women Voters of Ohio (LWVO), I am honored to advocate for all Ohio voters as well as our dues-paying members, who live in every state Senate District and nearly all Ohio House Districts.

The League has long championed policies for election security and integrity. As early as the 1940s, we began advocating for changes to balloting that would ensure fairness to all candidates as well as recounting protocols for close elections. We were one of the first to champion Ohio's bipartisan system of election planning, administration, and oversight. In more recent history, the League and its partners were able to secure election administration plans, post election audits, and early voting through legal settlements after the 2004 election. Most of our members volunteer to register voters and/or serve as poll workers. Our nonpartisan voter education programs reach approximately 1 million Ohioans each year.

The Ohio General Assembly was wise in limiting August Special Elections through HB 458, which just came into effect weeks ago. August Special Elections put strain on our hard working Boards of Elections and poll workers, frustrate voters, and ultimately waste taxpayer dollars.

In his 1967 inaugural address as Governor of California, the late Ronald Reagan said: "Government is the people's business, and every man, woman and child becomes a shareholder with the first penny of tax paid." As the budgeting process continues, you know very well that there is great competition for Ohio's tax dollars: roads, bridges, public transportation, clean water, local government support, education, services for seniors and people with disabilities, economic development, state parks, and tourism. I ask you to be good stewards of Ohio's tax dollars by rejecting an August Special election and to apply that \$20 Million to other needs. Even within the elections space, there are far better uses for funds including voter education, modernizing voter registration, and increasing poll worker pay.

Voter participation in August Special Elections is nearly nonexistent. Even when the August Election in 2022 was actually a second Primary Election for state legislative offices, the turnout was only 8%. It is undemocratic and unfair to put direct democracy on the ballot in an election when the vast majority of Ohioans will have no idea there even is an election taking place. If HJR1/SJR2 lands on the ballot this August, it is likely that well under 10% of voters in Ohio would decide whether it should be harder to amend the Ohio Constitution. If it is indeed your goal to protect our state Constitution, having an election in which so few Ohioans determine the outcome is not the way to do it, and in fact completely contradicts it.

The League is honored to stand with more than 225 allied organizations who represent Ohio citizens from all walks of life in opposition to HJR1/SJR2. It is undemocratic and unfair, because it would shred our constitution and abandon our proud tradition of direct democracy by making citizen-led ballot initiatives nearly impossible and far more costly. It is unnecessary, because the process is already challenging but not overused.

And lastly, it is unpopular. Police officers and firefighters. Construction workers and nurses. Faith leaders and teachers. Good government groups, local civic organizations, and so many others stand firmly in opposition to HJR1/SJR2. Some of the best policies in Ohio have been passed for and by the people through Constitutional ballot initiatives. Ohio voters have approved pensions for war veterans, funded school construction, and placed protections for the Ohio Constitution from monopolies. Ohioans voted to raise the minimum wage, provide low-income housing assistance, fund conservation and recreation areas, and invest in local communities, infrastructure improvements, and economic development.

I want to end with another powerful quote by Ronald Reagan from his 1957 address at Eureka College. "This democracy of ours which sometimes we've treated so lightly, is more than ever a comfortable cloak, so let us not tear it asunder, for no man knows once it is destroyed where or when he will find its protective warmth again."

I am quite sure you are getting a lot of pressure from special interest groups to make ballot initiatives harder through an August Special election, but I am here to ask you to do right by Ohio taxpayers, voters, and elections officials. I ask you to defend democracy as Ronald Reagan and so many other greats have called us to do by rejecting an August Special Election.

I am happy to answer any questions. Please feel free to contact me to discuss further at director@lwovhio.org or 614-469-1505. Thank you.

The League of Women Voters of Ohio was formed in May 1920 out of Ohio's woman suffrage movement. The League is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. The League has over 4000 members and 34 local Leagues across the Buckeye State.