

## Testimony on SB 92 and HB 144

Rep. Bob Peterson, Chair

Rep. Jim Thomas, Vice Chair

Rep. Elliot Forhan, Ranking Member

Submitted by: Mark Gooch

Chair Peterson, Vice Chair Thomas, Ranking Member Forhan, and members of the committee, thank you for hearing my testimony today. My name is Mark Gooch and I am speaking to you today as a concerned private citizen from Wooster, Ohio. I'm testifying in opposition to SB 92 and HB 144 designating an August Special Election.

In December 2022, the Ohio state legislature passed HB 458 eliminating August special elections. Suddenly, not four months later, you are trying to revive an August special election. Let me remind you of some of the statements made in support of eliminating an August special election.

HB 458 sponsor, Rep. Thomas Hall [emphasis is mine]: "Under current law, local political subdivisions may also place tax levies on the ballot at these historically low voter turnout elections. This amounts to ***gaming the system and trying to pass levies when most of the electorate is not engaged in the process.*** This bill would aim to ***stop this cycle of a small minority of the community deciding important tax levies during these elections***" and "August special elections are ***costly to taxpayers and fail to engage a meaningful amount of the electorate in the process.*** They should be eliminated from the elections calendar."

Secretary of State Frank LaRose in support of HB 458 [emphasis is mine]: "That means ***just a handful of voters end up making big decisions.*** The side that wins is often the ***one that has a vested interest in the passage of the issue up for consideration.***" and "***This isn't how democracy is supposed to work.*** More importantly, it doesn't have to. ***Voters are just as capable of voting on these important issues during the standard primary and general elections*** and there is no reason why these contests can't happen at the regularly scheduled primary and general elections which occur twice a year." And lastly, "Simply put, an August Special election is ***the last thing election officials should be dealing with as they ready themselves for an important November election*** that begins with the start of early voting in October. These unnecessary "off-cycle" elections aren't good for taxpayers, election officials. [sic] or the civic health of our state. ***It's time for them to go!***"

SB 92 and HB 144 contradict what was argued and put into law only a few months ago. I would especially point out Secretary LaRose's comment "The side that wins is often the one that has a vested interest in the passage of the issue up for consideration." In this case, Secretary LaRose is correct, there is a vested interest in getting HJR 1 on a

ballot when no one is paying attention or voting. This is the most undemocratic approach to trying to change the Ohio Constitution. In fact, Rep. Wiggam is quoted "Republicans aren't going to put it on the same ballot as the abortion issue. That's because if they both pass with 50%-plus-one, then abortion would be protected by a 60% threshold into the future."

So really this is a veiled attempt to undemocratically change the Ohio Constitution so as to make it more difficult for Ohioans to express their disagreement with legislators' work by making their own changes to the Constitution.

I haven't even begun to mention the \$20 million cost to taxpayers to hold this special election (another one of the reasons cited for eliminating August special elections). An August special election also puts an undo burden on the hard-working staff at each of the county Boards of Election across the state at a time when they need to be preparing for the general election in November. Just because there is only one issue on the ballot doesn't change the amount of work they have to perform to conduct an election.

I ask you to reject this undemocratic practice of holding an August special election and save the taxpayers \$20 million along with eliminating the added work on local Boards of Election.