

**Senate Bill 160 Sponsor Testimony**  
**State Senator Jerry C. Cirino**  
**10/03/2023**

Chair Peterson, Vice Chair Thomas, Ranking Member Humphrey and members of the House Government Oversight Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 158.

This bill is quite simple. Senate Bill 158 simply protects the budgeting powers of municipalities across Ohio by reinforcing their statutory authority to make appropriation decisions. Current law requires all appropriation decisions to be made by a municipal corporation's legislative authority (their city council). This bill further specifies that a local city council cannot have its statutory appropriation duties circumvented.

Councilmembers are the duly elected representatives of their city. It is their duty and responsibility under the law to appropriate city funds to care for the safety and security of their fellow residents. While Senate Bill 158's primary purpose is to preserve local budgetary security in all of our municipal corporations, timely passage of this legislation will specifically safeguard the City of Cleveland's financial stability, as they are facing an initiative to deprive the city of at least 2% of its budget.

While 2% may sound miniscule, in reality 2% of the city of Cleveland's budget represents any one of the following: the entirety of the Department of Public Health's budget, the entirety of the Building and Housing Department's budget, or more than 7 times the budget for the Department of Aging.

The initiative claims the amendment is about greater citizen participation in the budgeting process, but that claim disregards the fact that citizens already elect their council members and ignores the reality of "participatory budgeting." The reality of this budgeting process is that in nearly every American city where it has been tried, less than 5% of residents are involved.

Instead of involving more citizens, "participatory budgeting" becomes "privileged budgeting" where those better-off individuals have more time to participate, resulting in policies favoring those individuals and ignoring the basic needs of less well-off residents. This privilege can also be seen in the proposed initiative language itself, which requires paying the unelected members of its board with the redirected taxpayer dollars.

Some other ludicrous components of this amendment include allowing individuals as young as 16 to serve on this unelected board, permitting 13 year olds to vote on how the City of Cleveland's budget should be spent, and **requiring** the administrative budget of the board to increase by 2% each year with no maximum limit.

That is why there is widespread, bipartisan opposition to this initiative in the Cleveland community, with Cleveland officials, including the City Council President, having publicly spoken about the devastating impact this proposal would have on the city's budget.

Given this, and the particular egregiousness of this initiative and the destructive effects it will have on the City of Cleveland's budget, the bill contains an emergency clause to ensure this initiative does not threaten the basic health, safety or security of Clevelanders.

We must protect Cleveland, and all Ohio cities, from attacks on their budget. It is imperative to support our local firefighters, police officers, and other dedicated local public servants. This simple, straightforward bill does just that through the addition of one paragraph to the Revised Code, specifying that no one, no matter their status, can sidestep their locally elected officials.

Chairman Peterson, thank you again for allowing me the opportunity to testify today. I would be happy to answer any questions from the committee.