

Nicholas Ngong

SB158 Testimony

Chairman Peterson, Ranking Member Humphrey and the rest of the Government Oversight Committee, my name is Nicholas Moses Ngong, I am part of the People's Budget Steering Committee. Thank you for giving us the space to discuss our charter amendment with you all in this forum.

Participatory Budgeting has proven successful in other countries and across the world. Our charter amendment would be the first of its kind in Ohio. It is a charter amendment because the Cleveland City Council did not think it was an idea worth pursuing, an anomaly in the participatory budgeting movement. The members of our coalition disagreed. In asking Clevelanders how they felt, thousands of people who collected signatures for us and signed our charter amendment confirmed that this issue was important enough to them to vote on this November. Barring the passage of SB158, they will get that chance. To this body I ask, why should we be denied that opportunity? What is the threat to residents of Cleveland and more importantly for this body, Ohio, that makes a state ban on participatory budgeting necessary at all?

As important is the question of civic innovation in our great state. Participatory Budgeting is one of many exciting opportunities to expand democracy and empower residents to directly decide what city governments should prioritize. There is great reason to believe that PB will offer voters an unprecedented opportunity to make their voices heard and get those who otherwise wouldn't be involved in government involved.

If Cleveland voters do not like the People's Budget we put in front of them, please allow them to let us know in November. But if they do, as we believe they will, SB158 denies us the opportunity to try something new for Ohio, cutting off an opportunity for civic innovation which is as important as entrepreneurial innovation. Ohio can and should be a place known for its robust civic life, which SB158 suppresses. We hope each of you votes no against SB158, as it attempts to kill a citizen-led attempt to change our state's narrative around democracy.