



Representative Adam Mathews
56th House District

Representative Bob Peterson
91st House District

House State & Local Government Committee
Sponsor Testimony – H.B. 271
October 31, 2023

Chair John, Vice Chair Dean, Ranking Member Brennan, and members of the House State & Local Government Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present sponsor testimony on House Bill 271, which would adjust the current numbering convention for statewide ballot issues to prevent repeat issue numbers from being used in future elections.

Under current law, statewide ballot issues are numbered consecutively; however, the numbering resets after each election leading to repeat Issue 1's each time voters decide on a statewide ballot issue. This frequently leads to confusion for voters, reporters, and activists alike. While the effect is particularly apparent this year, as voters will be voting on two separate Issue 1's with politically opposite effects within months of each other, a cursory glance at search results for Issue 1 in Ohio yields websites and advertisements for past campaigns dating back years.

House Bill 271 would end this cycle beginning with the November 2024 election by specifying that, for elections occurring after the November 2024 election, statewide ballot issues be designated by the Arabic numeral consecutive to that of the last statewide ballot issue in the immediately preceding election. For example, if the November 2024 election features two statewide ballot issues, they would be numbered Issue 1 and Issue 2 respectively. If the next statewide ballot issue occurs on the November 2025 ballot, it would then be put to the voters as Issue 3, and so on. If this bill becomes law, no statewide issue number will ever again be repeated.

While drafting this bill, we heard from many voters and civically engaged Ohioans who wished for more clarity at the ballot box. Our aim in introducing this legislation is to ensure that each ballot issue put before the voters receives the unique and thoughtful debate it deserves. Other states have adopted similar provisions including South Dakota, which designates issues based on alphabet and only resets at the end of the alphabet and California, which numbers issues consecutively following previous elections in a similar way to this bill's proposal. Therefore, for a clearer and more robust civic process in Ohio, we urge your favorable consideration of this bill, and we are happy to answer any questions from the committee.