

Richard Barga
3808 Clinton Ave
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Dear Chairman Rulli and Ranking Member DeMora:

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to submit testimony on SB 158. My name is Richard Barga and I am writing to oppose the passage of Senate Bill 158.

I, along with thousands of Cleveland voters who have already signed petitions for participatory budgeting, deserve the opportunity to vote on Issue 38 in Cleveland. If the philosophy of conservative republicans is for a limitation on government powers, and the ability of individuals to self-govern, then SB 158 reeks of hypocrisy.

SB 158 is a blatant attempt to strip Clevelanders of their ability to decide for themselves on the question of creating a People's Budget. Does the state legislature seek to stop schools from putting levies on local ballots? Will the state interfere in local zoning processes next? Would this home rule state legislature be so overbearing as to stop all forms of democratic process from playing out?

The process of participatory budgeting has been used in hundreds of cities around the United States as a form of civic education and engagement for residents to work with elected officials and city government to determine how their taxpayer dollars are spent. Participation in our public processes shrink year to year, while leadership and power grabs have more access to how the public's funding is directed. Our goal should be to have an engaged citizenry, civically invested in building communities. What better way than to actually give the people some monetary authority over their own neighborhoods?

For years, the people's will has been squashed by special interest, gerry meandering, pay for play politics, and this is but one more form of denying people their right to self govern. If the will of the people is so threatening to this group of established republicans, then we must rethink our entire form of governance. Democracy is best served in the capable hands of the voters themselves.

I strongly oppose SB 158, and would be happy to speak with any members of the committee in more details about my opposition.

Sincerely,

Richard Barga