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Chairman Rulli, Ranking Member Demora, and the rest of the General Government Committee, thank you for your time and your willingness to hear feedback on SB 158.

I am an organizer with Northern Ohioans for Budget Legislation Equality (NOBLE), as well as a member of the People's Budget Cleveland Steering Committee. I am here to voice my opposition to the proposed legislation due to a number of reasons: it is a blatant violation of home rule and it protects a status quo in Cleveland which does not serve our city or state.

Participatory Budgeting is not a new or radical idea. It is not a left-wing or right-wing idea. It is an idea designed to encourage responsible governance, civic engagement, and the restoration of faith in all of our democratic institutions. Since 1989 it has been implemented to various degrees in over 1500 different cities across the world, including the American cities of Durham, Vallejo, Grand Rapids, Evanston, Boston, Tacoma, Greensboro, Seattle, Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago, among many others. Citizens are allocated a small portion of their own tax dollars for which they can submit proposals and then vote as a city on which projects receive part of the allocated funds.

I want to emphasize that Issue 38, Cleveland's participatory budgeting charter amendment, is not an attempt to replace or supersede the legislative authority of our elected city council. With a four year ramp up, Issue 38 would cap the Participatory Budgeting funds at an amount equivalent to only 2% of the city's General Fund, and the amendment also gives our city council full discretion in how they find those funds. If they decide to seek outside revenue sources, nothing in the amendment stipulates that they would need to pull directly from our General Fund whatsoever. Additionally, the process is guided by a resident steering committee partly appointed by the council. This has always been intended as a collaborative effort with our city government.

To be clear, this ballot initiative would not bring Participatory Budgeting to Columbus, Youngstown, Defiance, Canton, Sandusky, or any Ohio municipality other than one: the city of Cleveland. This is happening in Cleveland specifically because of the way that our insular political culture has shielded spending from public accountability. Special interests and developer handouts are consistently prioritized over the needs of Cleveland's residents, about a third of whom live below the poverty line. A one party monopoly on our city government means that most substantive debate and discussion occurs behind closed doors. City Council meetings are largely ceremonial affairs where legislation is passed unanimously due to the Unit rule. Clevelanders were not even allowed to make Public Comment at city council meetings until 2022, and that itself only came about as the result of a grassroots pressure campaign. This is all setting aside the horrific frequency of genuine public corruption in our city. Just last

year, Councilman Ken Johnson was given a six year prison sentence for siphoning over \$127,000 of public money directly into his own pockets. To top it off, \$512,000,000 in ARPA dollars was allocated without the majority of Clevelanders even knowing the city had received that money, let alone being afforded any opportunities for citizen input. According to the Brookings Institute, \$340 million of it has gone directly to the salaries of city employees.

This is a Cleveland-based initiative that is designed to protect a small amount of money from Cleveland's calcified political machine and ensure that the needs and expertise of ordinary Clevelanders are respected. Clevelanders should have the right to decide for themselves if this is the correct path forward for our city. We collected over 6,400 signatures in 45 days to ensure that they have the opportunity to do so on November 7th.

Should Issue 38 pass, there are substantive debates to still be had about its implementation, but those debates will be between Clevelanders and take place in Cleveland. We believe in the potential of PB to revitalize civic engagement in our city and fund the sorts of public projects that Clevelanders badly need to address our food deserts, crumbling roads, and collapsing neighborhoods. But we do not rely on belief alone, as participatory budgeting has been the subject of a substantial body of research surrounding its benefits and best practices. We would be happy to submit some of this research to your offices for your perusal. Should SB158 pass, all that will have been accomplished is the styming of a good faith local effort to have our city do better by its residents. I am urging you not to support this bill. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Evan O'Reilly