



Testimony of Catherine Gunsalus, Director of State Advocacy  
Heritage Action for America  
February 21, 2024

**Proponent Testimony: SB 215**

Submitted to the Ohio Senate General Government Committee

Chairman Rulli and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 215. My name is Catherine Gunsalus and I am the Director of State Advocacy at Heritage Action for America, a national grassroots organization with two million conservative activists nationwide, including thousands of Ohioans.

Heritage Action supports Senate Bill 215 and we thank Senator Gavarone and Senator McColley for introducing this important legislation to ensure Ohio's elections are free from the corrupting influence of foreign funding. Free and fair elections are the bedrock of our republic, and every Ohioan should have confidence in the security and integrity of our election system.

In George Washington's 1796 Farewell Address,<sup>1</sup> he cautioned that "foreign influence is one of the most baneful foes of republican government." With growing geopolitical threats like the influence of the Chinese Communist Party,<sup>2</sup> Ohio is wise to ensure the integrity of its elections and guard against the influence of foreign actors that could seek to undermine Ohio's interests.

Senate Bill 215 is important for three key reasons:

1. Prohibiting foreign nationals from contributing to ballot issue campaigns ensures Ohioans' voices are not diluted, and decisions about Ohio's Constitution and laws are based on the voices of its citizens – not foreign billionaires. Heritage Action lobbies alongside and on behalf of grassroots across the country, including here in Ohio. Protecting Ohio's elections from outside influence is top of mind for the grassroots and they are keenly aware of the fact that the integrity of our government and protecting liberty hinge upon the ability to conduct transparent, accurate and fair elections. Grassroots are determined to ensure that their voice is heard, and they can have confidence in the electoral process.
2. Since 2000, the state of Ohio has banned foreign national contributions to political candidates running for office. SB 215 would make Ohio's laws consistent and ensure

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<sup>1</sup> <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-20-02-0440-0002>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.heritage.org/asia/report/why-state-legislatures-must-confront-chinese-infiltration>

fairness in Ohio's electoral process by also banning foreign national contributions to ballot issues. The U.S. federal government rightly limits the participation of foreign individuals, entities, and governments in national political campaigns. Preventing external financial influence from steering election outcomes towards foreign interests rather than those of the United States should be a priority at the state level as well.

3. Foreign meddling in the U.S. political landscape is not a hypothetical problem and states like Ohio are right to address it. Foreign nationals are making campaign contributions aimed at influencing Ohio's elections. Further, Ohio is not alone in its endeavor to push back. Other states across the country like Oklahoma and Arizona are also taking initiative to protect their state elections from foreign funding by introducing similar legislation.

Ohio has already made great strides in strengthening the security and integrity of its elections process and has the opportunity to continue to lead by passing SB 215. **I urge you to vote yes on SB 215.** Thank you for your time and attention to this issue.