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Sponsor Testimony  
Senate Bill 215  
General Government Committee  
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Chairman Rulli, Vice Chairman Schuring, and fellow Members of the Senate General Government Committee, thank you for the chance to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 215, legislation which prevents foreign interests from participating, directly or indirectly, in ballot issues.

Both Ohio and federal law already prohibit foreign interests from participating in candidate races. Therefore, this bill simply closes a campaign finance loophole for issue campaigns. Nearly 80% of voters favor a ban on foreign individuals and entities funding ballot initiatives, with the support for the ban being strong amongst Republicans, Democrats, and Independents.<sup>1</sup> Multiple states have similar laws already in place or legislation pending to prohibit foreign contributions in these campaigns.<sup>2</sup>

In addition, this legislation retains current law requiring campaigns that accept money from foreign interests to pay a fine equal to 3x the amount accepted or \$10,000, whichever is greater. Strengthens the requirement that the campaign also repay the contribution by making this a mandatory requirement. Current law only requires repayment if the Secretary of State so orders.

Senate Bill 215 also specifies that expenditures made during the signature gathering phase, including expenditures made to defeat or frustrate signature gathering, are subject to the requirements of the bill and cannot be funded by foreign interests.

Lastly, SB 215 ensures that the group working on the ballot initiative is classified as PAC. This ensures these groups comply with the PAC filing requirements. These requirements include ongoing campaign finance disclosures and a new requirement that the PAC treasurer certify that the group has not accepted foreign contributions.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://publicconsultation.org/united-states/foreign-funding-of-ballot-initiatives/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/legal/legalindustry/states-localities-take-foreign-influenced-political-spending-2023-05-30/>

To be clear, this campaign-finance reform measure will ensure that all of Ohio's elections are not impacted by foreign influences and will better protect Ohio's elections from foreign interests hiding behind "dark money" entities like 501(C)(4)s. For example, in 2023, the Sixteen Thirty Fund spent over \$13 million dollars across all three Ohio ballot campaigns. This fund has received over \$220 million dollars from Swiss billionaire Hansjorg Wyss since 2016. Senate Bill 215 would ensure that foreign billionaires cannot influence elections in our state.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on SB 215. We would be more than happy to answer any questions the committee may have.