

Michael Ahern's Testimony
Before the Government Accountability and Oversight Committee
December 11, 2018

Good afternoon, Chairman Blessing and distinguished members of the Government Accountability and Oversight Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today on what I consider a bedrock issue underpinning the strength of our democracy. The appropriate level of effort citizens must take in order to place a State Constitutional Amendment on the ballot.

My name is Michael Ahern from Blacklick, OH. I am here today as a registered voter. I am not affiliated with any Party. I vote conservatively on some issues and liberally on others, and I always learn about candidates and issues before voting. I am not beholden to any Party or political ideology and with rare exception, I increasingly am not represented in the political process because of political maneuvering of both major Parties in Ohio that is focused on political influence rather than Statesman-like legislating.

It is my observation that for a significant portion of our history, most legislators by-and-large, kept in mind the greater good of the Country or State as legislation was introduced and deliberated once elections were over. However, I have grown increasingly concerned about the focus of certain Senators and Representatives on a more secure hold on power rather than the needs of their fellow Ohioans as both political Parties have become increasingly partisan. This is one reason I supported State, and then Federal Redistricting reform - so that ideas and positions that work their way into the legislature will be inherently less partisan, more balanced and better represent all Ohioans.

In the latter recent action, approved overwhelmingly by the electorate, the Ohio General Assembly correctly placed Constitutional redistricting reform for federal District Representation on the ballot after a clear and sound citizen-based Constitutional Amendment initiative. This recent action promoting fairer representation and, I believe ultimately more balanced legislation from our elected officials, would not have happened but for the power provided by the State Constitution for citizens to initiate Constitutional Amendments. The standards and processes to get a citizen-initiated Constitutional Amendment on the ballot are currently high and rigorous. Only significant, fundamental issues move sufficient numbers of Ohioans to exert sufficient effort to get a citizen-initiated Constitutional Amendment on the ballot.

Be clear that I support Representative Democracy. However, people run for office for many reasons. As you well know, some find a career in it and some, with respect to House positions, leverage the current primary process in both political Parties to gain nomination based on extreme partisan positions and then use the current gerrymandered Districts to gain office more easily. Additionally, a host of special interests support consolidation of political Party might in an effort to gain consistent political influence through legislators. Sometimes this leads to too much focus on what is best for a political Party than what is best for Ohioans. Today's proposed legislation weakens the fundamental fabric of a government "Of the People" and tips the balance of power away from citizens and toward political Parties and lobbyists.

Even without today's proposed legislation, individual citizens have little power to lobby and influence legislation or to Amend our State Constitution in comparison to professional lobbyists and Party machinery. But the Framers of Ohio's Constitution intentionally provided an unaffiliated, apolitical avenue for citizens to address Constitutional issues deemed important enough and widely impactful

enough to get a vote by Ohioans. This avenue through the citizen-initiated petition process is a process that currently sets the bar high and allows the legislature to temper and harmonize proposed Constitutional changes put before voters. The placement and passage of Issue 1 on Redistricting Reform is the most recent example and was overwhelmingly supported by Ohio's voters.

I am here today to urge you to be a Statesman rather than a Party Representative and to not infringe on the rights of citizens to Petition the electorate regarding changes to Ohio's Constitution. The current bar is appropriately set and HJR 19 is deeply flawed, partisan legislation that aims to protect political Party power, not the general welfare of Ohioans. Vote to reject proposed HJR 19.

Thank you for your time and consideration.